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'Fields Enter the Door' Shows off Rebuilt Playwright Center

By John Freedman

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In the new production of “Fields Enter the Door,” actress Natalya Gandzyuk not only performs the songs in her soaring voice, she wrote the music.

It has been a long season for Moscow's two newest artistic directors. A year ago the Moscow Culture Committee made the astonishing announcement that Boris Yukhananov and his longtime colleague Klim had been appointed to run the Stanislavsky Theater and the Playwright and Director Center, respectively.

Both are innovators and iconoclasts, both studied under the legendary Anatoly Vasilyev, and both, throughout 25-year-long careers, have had difficulty getting their art into the marketplace. Assuming positions of leadership at top theaters meant an amazing turnaround in the biography of each.

Yukhananov spent this first season radically rebuilding the Stanislavsky. He originally planned to reopen in early spring 2014, but the complete reconfiguration of the hall is taking

longer than expected. The theater now plans to reopen in November 2014.

Klim had no such grandiose plans for the small Playwright and Director Center, although he did immediately seek to change the way his theater creates shows. He immersed himself in several workshops and training exercises on various projects. The point was not to go into rehearsals specifically to create a show that would at some given time open for the public, but rather to experiment and see what would grow out of rehearsals.

After an entire season's work, Klim has now added three new shows to the repertoire at the Playwright and Director Center, all of them one-actor treatments of works by great poets. They are "Retribution," based on Alexander Blok's narrative poem; "Nonbeing in Daylight," a treatment of poetry by Joseph Brodsky; and "Fields Enter the Door," a refined musical piece based on the writings of the great Chuvash poet Gennady Aigi.

In all cases Klim minimizes his own role in the process. "This is not director's theater," he declared to the audience before "Fields Enter the Door" was performed. "It is actor-centric work."

In any case, we can definitely say three things about this production — the work of the actress Natalya Gandzyuk is, at times, breathtaking; the texts by Aigi are dazzling and challenging; and the form that the performance takes, for which Klim, presumably, answers, is radically limited and absolutely precise.

This is not a performance that one emerges from thinking, "I liked that" or "I did not like that." That would be an inadequate response to the depth of thought, labor and research that went into the piece, to say nothing of the rigorous, moving end result that came of the process.

Aigi's poetry expressing an unassailable strength of spirit in the midst of isolation, alienation and, even, intellectual despair is utterly non-theatrical. It tells no stories, gives rise to no characters. It is deeply philosophical while, at the same time, butter-rich in staggering images. "I must / with my lips / reach as far as her infinite eyes," he wrote in "Familial," one of 33 short poems that Gandzyuk turned into songs.

Gandzyuk not only performs the songs in her beautiful, soaring voice, she wrote the music. If there is a kind of similarity, though not repetition, of melodies and rhythms in all of the songs, this also serves to create a thread running through Aigi's poems and binding them together in a unified sonic space.

If we wish, we can play the "if" game with other aspects of this performance.

If the lighting seems excessively dark at times — so that we rarely see the actress's face or eyes — it also encourages us to transfer ourselves along with her into a deeply private inner world. Or, if Gandzyuk's highly controlled gestures and choreographed movements on stage seem excessively limited and unnatural, we at some point begin seeing in them echoes of the bold, muscular structure of Aigi's poetic declarations.

"Fields Enter the Door" is a rich work combining literature, poetry, song and acting. It does not entertain us, nor does it tell us a story. It encourages us to open our minds to the

complexity of artistic expression and human experience.

Did I have little complaints as I watched this piece unfold slowly over two hours' time? Yes. Do I sometimes complain about the wind blowing too hard or the sun shining too hot? Yes, I do. But so what?

"Fields Enter the Door" (Polya Vkhodyat v Dver) plays Thurs. and Sun. at 8 p.m. at the Playwright and Directed Center, located at 5 Begovaya Ulitsa. Metro Begovaya. Tel. 495-945-3245. cdr.theatre.ru*. Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes.*

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