

Take a Vacation to Crimea at Embattled Teatr.doc

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Teatr.doc has been forced out of its home in central Moscow but will still play at different venues in the city.

To be or not to be, that is the question these days for Teatr.doc.

A move by city authorities to oust the famous little theater from its basement in the center of Moscow will probably be successful. The chances are better than good that Doc, as the theater is affectionately known, will vacate its space after 12 years of hard work and history-making.

The good news is that if anyone had thoughts of closing the theater down, they have probably abandoned them now. The most likely scenario is that sometime after the end of November, Teatr.doc shows will begin popping up on various stages around town until a single address is chosen as the theater's new home.

In the meantime, Doc continues to be what it has been all along — a feisty playhouse that challenges the status quo every chance it gets.

Consider this: On Monday the venue hosts the one-day Reboot Festival curated by Georgian critic Maya Mamaladze. The event bears the title "Putin's Mama" and it will feature the showing of Ineke Smits' documentary film of that name, as well as a reading of a new play of that name by leading Georgian playwright Lasha Bugadze.

Gee, I wonder if that might ruffle any feathers?

But aside from special programs, the theater will continue, at least through November, to run the shows in its repertoire. A performance of "Vacation in Crimea" on Nov. 17 may be the last chance to see this brand-new piece in the space where it was created.

It is worth a watch.

This is the kind of stuff that directors and actors at Teatr.doc can do in their sleep. Barbed political satire. Fast-and-loose acting. Cutting and pasting of history and fantasy. Toss in an imagined dramatic twist or two, shake, bake and serve.

"Vacation" is the latest entry in an on-going series of satires set in Moscow offices. This time an ad agency gets a government contract to create a campaign encouraging vacationers to bypass Turkey, Egypt and Bulgaria and go, instead, to Crimea.

One of the slogans the team comes up with during a brainstorming session: "Give up your vacation for the sake of your country!"

This and similar lines draw repeated bursts of laughter as the performers willingly descend into the silly and the absurd in search of the perfect advertising hook. A video screen shows excerpts from popular Soviet movies shot in Crimea that, depending upon your point of view, make Crimea look seductively attractive, or like a place you would avoid like the plague.

But this is all prologue to what happens after one of the employees has an iPhone recharger blow up in her face. Is she transformed back into the Soviet Union of 1981, or is she simply knocked out and left to wander the crooked corridors of her dreams?

This is theater, folks. Who knows?

In any case, the dazed ad writer (Inga Smetanina) now encounters all the same people she works with in her regular job — the office boss (Roman Indyk), a couple of clownish men who seem to do things in pairs even when they are in competition (Sergei Shevchenko and Mikhail Rudenko), and a smart young woman (Anna Deryabina), who often seems to be on the outside looking in.

In their new "incarnations," these people are employees of a local Crimean newspaper who have been charged with telling the Soviet public good news about the place in which they live. They think, à la Gogol's "Inspector General," that the visiting ad woman is a big wig sent from Moscow and they treat her like royalty.

At least they do until they decide she's an American spy and they try to run her out.

"Vacation in Crimea" picks on an array of topical hot points that the creative team cleverly yanked from the daily news and serves up as punchlines. There is also a touching, dramatic scene in which the time traveler, trapped in the past, calls home and has a tearful phone conversation with the version of herself from 33 years ago.

In the honored tradition of Teatr.doc, this swift, usually light-hearted show does not shy away from engaging controversial topics with humor and direct hits. See it and other shows nurtured in this basement while you still have the chance.

"Vacation in Crimea" (Otpusk v Krymu) plays Nov. 17 at 7 p.m. at [Teatr.doc](#). 11/13 Tryokhprudny Pereulok, Bldg. 1. Metro Pushkinskaya. +7 (916) 653-0989. Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes.

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