The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

A New Take on Russian Classics—Three Must-See Performances

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February 09, 2017



Pushkin's Fairy Tales **Theater of Nations**

Even if your Russian isn't terrific, here are three shows playing in Moscow that you ought to see. Get out your translations of Alexander Pushkin's fairy tales, Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Idiot" and Viktor Pelevin's "Chapayev and Void" and do your homework. You'll be able to follow the action on stage in these radical new productions.

"Pushkin's Fairy Tales"

Not just for children

Renowned theater director and visual artist Robert Wilson interprets Pushkin in his first production in Russia. The performance is based on five of the best-known fairy tales by Alexander Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet: "The Tale of Tsar Saltan," "The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish," "The Tale of the Priest and of His Workman Balda," "The Tale of

the Golden Cockerel,"⊠as well as his more obscure story, "The⊠She-Bear" and excerpts from "Ruslan and⊠Lyudmila." CocoRosie, an American duo,⊠pioneers of "freak folk," wrote the music⊠for "Pushkin's Fairytales" and that's half⊠of its success. The other half is the incredible⊠visual imagery Wilson created after extensive⊠research into Russian culture and⊠traditions. Yevgeny Mironov, the theater's⊠artistic director, plays the storyteller, aka⊠Pushkin, in what is one of his most memorable⊠roles.

"The Idiot"

Dostoevskian circus

One of the last season's hits, this brilliant⊠reimagining of Fyodor Dostoevsky's⊠"Idiot" by Maxim Didenko has only a⊠couple of monologues throughout the⊠whole performance. Much of the performance⊠is nonverbal - more of a circus⊠clowns' performance than traditional⊠theater. Be prepared: this is standard⊠theatrical practice for Didenko, whose⊠productions are never traditional.⊠Didenko usually mixes elements of all⊠the performing arts in his work, from⊠contemporary dance to musical numbers.⊠In this unorthodox version of one⊠of Russia's most well-known classics,⊠Ingeborga Dapkunaite, famous for her⊠numerous TV and film roles, plays Prince⊠Myshkin, while the rest of the roles are⊠played by men. The vivid stage decorations⊠and video mapping by the designer⊠Pavel Semchenko from the 'AXE' theatre⊠are supplemented by Ivan Kushnir's⊠fabulous music.

"Chapayev and Void"

Music and Zen

"Chapayev and Void," also known as⊠"Buddha's Little Finger" or "Clay Machine⊠Gun" in English translations, is⊠a novel by Viktor Pelevin that was first⊠published in 1996. It takes place in two⊠time periods, revolutionary and modern⊠Russia, with a poet who may not⊠be sane. But whether you've read this⊠modern Russian literature classic or⊠not, this production by Maxim Didenko⊠will keep you in your seat, completely⊠spellbound. "Chapayev" shows another⊠aspect of Didenko's talent. In this⊠production he has turned the first and⊠longest act into a musical. There is a⊠whole live band on stage, including⊠guitar, drums, saxophone and lots of⊠singing. Ivan Kushnir, Didenko's long⊠time collaborator, wrote the music.⊠The second act is devoted to one of the⊠scenes of the novel when several characters⊠get high on mushrooms. The⊠third is more of a contemporary dance⊠performance.

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