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Russian Culture Ministry Sends State-Funded Theaters Their Marching Orders

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Premiere of "Cherevichki" at the Helikon Opera Moscow Musical Theater. **Arthur Novosiltsev / Moskva News Agency**

This week all theaters in Russia that are funded by the federal government received a letter from the Culture Ministry informing them of planned changes in the state mission tasks. The main task is no longer filling theaters. It's the "creation of works reflecting the traditional Russian spiritual-moral values."

Theaters have been asked to review their repertory and determine "which value fits each play" based on President Vladimir Putin's Nov. 9, 2022, decree on the preservation and strengthening of traditional values. The list of values is rather long and includes "a strong family, high moral ideals, charity, patriotism, humanism, service to the Motherland" as well as "life, dignity, the rights and freedoms of the individual, justice, and the unity of the nations of Russia."

The drafters of the document cited the need for immediate measures to defend theater-goers from "the activity of extremist and terrorist organizations, the actions of the US and its allies,

transnational corporations, and foreign non-commercial organizations."

According to sources familiar with the process, theaters are directed to make a table with values at the top and play down the page and mark which values each play represents. This was understood by one theater employee as a funding issue. "If someone complains that some version of 'The Wedding' [a play by Nikolai Gogol-ed.] doesn't reflect 'family values,' then logically there won't be any state funding for it," they said.

Theater critic Marina Davydova commented that, "These people are ignorant, but they know how to achieve their goals. And their goals are simple — they are going to seek out, identify and destroy everything that is alive on the Russian stage. They aren't going to do it with forms and tables. They are just going to sniff them out."

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