

Underground Belarus Free Theatre Performs in Washington on September 15-16



Washington, D.C. – The Georgetown University Theater and Performance Studies Program, in association with Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company and in cooperation with the We Remember Civil Initiative, presents the internationally acclaimed Belarus Free Theatre at the Davis Performing Arts Center’s Devine Studio Theatre.

Effectively banned in its home country, this underground troupe from Minsk, Belarus will perform the area premiere of “Generation Jeans” on Sept. 15, a freedom fighter’s semi-autobiographical monologue which details growing up as a member of the counterculture that regarded jeans and Western pop music as a symbol of rebellion.

On Sept. 16, the company performs the U.S. premiere of “Discover Love,” based on the true story of Irina Krasovskaya, whose husband Anatoly, a businessman who supported the Belarus opposition movement, was kidnapped and murdered. The performance takes place exactly 10 years after Anatoly and Victor Gonchar, the Vice-Speaker of the Belarusian Parliament, disappeared on Sept. 16, 1999.

Irina, who is now based in Washington, D.C., co-founded We Remember, a civil initiative that disseminates information about politically motivated disappearances of Belarusian

citizens and informs the world community about the situation. A memorial reception organized by Irina Krasovskya follows the Sept. 16 premiere.

“This is an extraordinary opportunity to introduce the Georgetown community and D.C. audiences to two urgent works from a world-class company doing theater that couldn’t matter more,” says Davis Performing Arts Center Artistic Director Derek Goldman.

Since its founding in 2005 in Europe’s last surviving dictatorship, Belarus Free Theatre has been giving memorable performances in apartments, bars, and other private locations, alerting audiences to the location of performances and time – often the middle of the day – through text messages and e-mail.

The husband-and-wife team of Nikolai Khalezin and Natalya Koliada and director Vladimir Scherban created the company as a means to resist government censorship and have garnered praise from around the world for their powerful message and visceral, dynamic aesthetic. “Drama doesn’t come more urgently political than in the work of the Belarus Free Theatre,” noted *The Times*.

Renowned playwright Tom Stoppard has praised their “marvelous work,” noting that “What I saw in Minsk is much closer to a true theatre, to its sources, to its true objective,” and Nobel Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter has said, “They’re bringing back the essence meaning of the theatre.”

Described as a love story, “Discover Love” explores the reflections of a woman who finds out her husband has been kidnapped and murdered. Following the initial shock of the tragedy, her thoughts turn to words left unsaid, dreams unrealized. The work intermingles the experience of the widow Irina Krasovskaya with that of similar stories of women from Asia, South America and Latin America.

For “Discover Love” and the troupe’s previous activities, Belarus Free Theatre received the French Republic Human Rights Prize in 2007, marking the first time in the history of the prize that it was awarded to a cultural institution. Collection of materials for the piece took nine years, and the play launched an artistic campaign to support the UN Convention against enforced disappearances in the world.

Both “Generation Jeans” and “Discover Love” are underscored by a soundtrack from DJ Laurel (Lavr Berzhanin) and performed in Russian with subtitles.

Sept. 15, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. / Generation Jeans

Sept. 16, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. / Discover Love

Davis Performing Arts Center, Devine Studio Theatre
(37th and O Streets, NW – Washington, D.C.)

Tickets are \$12 general; \$10 faculty/staff/senior (65 or older); and \$5 student. To order, visit <http://performingarts.georgetown.edu> or call (202) 687-ARTS (2787).

Foreign Policy: An Unwanted Guest



Irina Krasovskaya and David Kramer published a piece in Foreign Policy on the European Union’s recent overtures to Belarus.

David Kramer was most recently Assistant Secretary of State for democracy, human rights and labor and, before that, a deputy assistant secretary of state responsible for Russia,

Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, in the George W. Bush administration. Irina Krasovskaya is president of the We Remember Foundation.

They argue that the European Union's policy of engaging the Belarusian regime is counterproductive, because so far it has only led to deterioration of human rights situation in Belarus. Here is what they conclude:

The Lukashenko regime continues to engage in human rights abuses even as relations with the West warm up... Lukashenko is a master at playing Russia and the West off of each other, delivering little to neither... Further Western engagement with Belarus makes sense, but only so long as the Lukashenko government takes more positive steps in the area of human rights. It takes two to tango.

Read the full text at Foreignpolicy.com

Belarus Round Table at the German Marshall Fund of the United States

President Alexander Lukashenko somewhat softened pressures on the democratic opposition in Belarus over the past year, releasing political prisoners in August 2008, and allowing some space for opposition parties during the September 2008 parliamentary elections. At the same time however, electoral manipulations and continued repressions against civic activists indicate that the regime is far from allowing substantial freedoms to its citizens. Additionally, the global

financial meltdown has forced Minsk to undertake several steps that seemed unthinkable a few years ago, including cutting a number of social benefits, devaluing the Belarusian Ruble, initiating further privatization of key state-owned assets, and seeking loans from Russia and the IMF. On the international stage, Lukashenko continues to maneuver between East and West, though it remains to be seen if improved ties with Western Europe will lead to a liberalization of the political situation in Belarus.

Against this background, it is important for democratic opposition and civil society throughout Belarus to seek an active and constructive role, address the mounting economic, political, and social problems, and propose alternative policies to tackle these challenges in the coming year. Please join **Pavol Demes**, director of GMF's Bratislava office, as he leads a discussion with **Irina Krasovskaya**, president of the We Remember Foundation, and **Pavel Marozau**, coordinator of the Third Way of Belarus, on recent changes in Belarus and possibilities for future development. The roundtable event will be held at GMF's offices at **1700 18th Street NW on Thursday, February 12, from 3:30pm to 5:00pm.**

This roundtable will be **followed by the opening of the [exhibition "Art Against Dictatorship,"](#)** organized by the Third Way of Belarus and the Belarusian Museum in New York – in cooperation with several local and global initiatives. This traveling exhibition addresses the integral part that the alternative arts scene plays in preserving and enhancing Belarusian culture, particularly in the face of political pressures that marginalize their mainstream presence, and will provide unique insights into contemporary Belarusian art. The reception will be held from 5:00 – 6:30pm.

Please RSVP for both events to Carolyn Colome by email (widereuropeintern2@gmfus.org) or phone (202 683-2655) by Tuesday, February 10th.