

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924. The company's first production was the now little-known *The Tide* by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945. In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

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PROSCENIUM

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The Government Inspector

By Nikolai Gogol

Adapted by Adrian Mitchell

The Government Inspector

Wednesday 1st November to Saturday 4th November 2006
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The Government Inspector

By
Nikolai Gogol

Adapted by Adrian Mitchell

The Governor	Richard Kessel
The Judge	Duncan Sykes
The Charity Commissioner	Mike Williams
The Schools Superintendent.....	Carl Quaif
Dr Gibner	Alan Bobroff
The Postmaster	Mark Sutherland
Bobchinsky	Christina Baker
Dobchinsky	Paul Davis
Svistunov – Police Constable	Mark Fuller
Police Inspector	Olwen Mears
Anna – the Governor’s wife	Anne Gerrard
Marya – their daughter	Lynette Shanbury
Osip.....	Robert Ewen
Khlestakov.....	Vince Eavis
Waiter.....	Peter Winter
Mishka – the Governor’s servant	Charles Anthony
Merchant 1.....	Alan Bobroff
Merchant 2.....	Charles Anthony
Locksmith’s Wife	Clare Wooster
Sergeant’s Widow.....	Kathleen Jones
Korobkin	Mark Fuller
Korobkin’s wife	Caroline Bronne-Shanbury
Superintendent’s wife – Mrs Khlopov	Kathleen Jones
Gendarme	Charles Anthony
Director	Shirley Wootten
Set Design	Richard Kessel & Shirley Wootten
Stage Manager	Caroline Bronne-Shanbury
Costumes.....	Evelyn Moutrie
Properties	Noelle Barrett
Lighting & Sound.....	Compass Theatre

Act 1 Scene 1 The meeting room of the Governor’s house, mid-morning.

Act 1 Scene 2 A small room at the inn, immediately following.

Act 1 Scene 3 The drawing room of the Governor’s house, later that day.

Act 2 Scene 1 The drawing room, the morning after.

Act 2 Scene 2 The same, a little later.

The action takes place in a small town in Russia, a long, long way from St Petersburg, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Poster and flyer designed by Sipo Siwo. Sipo trained at Goldsmiths College; he specialises in the moving image but also works in interactive media, web, illustration and print graphics. sipoh@hotmail.com

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THE AUTHOR

Nikolai Gogol was born in Sorochinski, Ukraine, in 1809. His parents were members of the minor aristocracy, his father, an educated and gifted man, wrote plays and poems, and Nikolai grew up happily on the family’s country estate. After a boarding school education, Nikolai, uncertain whether he wanted to be an actor or a writer, moved to St Petersburg in 1828. To support himself he worked for two years at minor governmental jobs (perhaps the inspiration for some of the officials in ‘The Government Inspector’).

In 1831 he came under the influence of Pushkin – a friendship which lasted until the poet’s death – left the civil service and began to write. To make ends meet he also followed an academic career, teaching history at the Patriotic Institute and then St Petersburg University. In 1832 he published his first successful story, ‘Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka’, followed by two volumes of short stories which included ‘Taras Bulba’, ‘The Diary of a Madman’ and ‘The Nose’. This last is the story of Kavalev’s quest to recapture his runaway nose – without which he cannot climb the Moscow social ladder: *without an arm or leg it is not unbearable but without a nose a man is, the devil knows what.*

All these early works have a powerful surrealist and absurdist quality, an extraordinary mixture of the fantastic and the macabre, the comic and the tragic. Gogol wrote: *I am destined by the mysterious powers to walk hand in hand with my strange heroes, viewing life in all its immensity as it rushes past me, viewing it through laughter seen by the world and tears unseen and unknown by it.* These works proved a great influence on the young Dostoevsky.

In 1836 he left the university, just before the first performance on 19 April of 'The Government Inspector'. The play was a success, but was heavily criticised by right-wing critics, and Gogol fled from Russia, visited Germany, Switzerland and France, before settling in Rome. He even went on a pilgrimage to Palestine in 1848. While abroad he wrote 'Dead Souls' and 'The Overcoat'. In his later years he returned to Russia, came under the influence of a fanatical priest, Father Konstantinovskii, burned the sequels to 'Dead Souls' and wrote a (never performed) epilogue to 'The Government Inspector' where the characters rather unconvincingly explain that the play is a religious allegory. He died in 1852 because of the poor medical treatment he received after he had seriously weakened himself by savage fasting undertaken as part of his private battle with Satan.

THE BACKGROUND

Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century – the Russia of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and Turgenev – was largely the creation of Peter the Great a century earlier. Peter had dragged Russia out of the Middle Ages in a few brief years, just as Stalin was ruthlessly to initiate crash-industrialisation in the nineteenth thirties. Peter's achievement was similar to Stalin's. He modernised Russia, but only at the cost of establishing a huge, caste-ridden bureaucracy, and a country flooded by paper-work and ruled by fear.

The enormous size of Russia, combined with its bitter winters and primitive transport, meant that local governors were often days, or even weeks, travel from their neighbours. In their own territories they were absolute rulers, little tsars. Only one thing kept them firmly under state control – the government inspectors.

THE PLAY

'The Government Inspector' is a scathing satire on small-town bureaucracy and petty officialdom, which mixes humour, realism and the grotesque in a theatrical style well ahead of its time. Gogol's instructions to the actors emphasised the importance of grasping *the universal significance of the roles*. Mainly due to Pushkin's influence, the play rather surprisingly passed the censor and the Tsar was in the audience for the first performance. As he left his box he commented: *What a play! Gets at everyone, and most of all me.* The radical intelligentsia found it an indictment of a corrupt Tsarist regime, and the conservatives thought it unpatriotic and subversive. Its satire and its humanity are still potent today.

GOGOL ON GOGOL

Petersburg is not half what I expected ... All the civil servants and officials can talk about is their department or government office: everything seems to have been crushed under a great weight, everyone is drowned by the trivial, meaningless labours at which he spends his useless life.

I have always avoided politics ... It is not the poet's job to worm his way into the worldly market place.

In 'The Government Inspector' I decided to gather into one heap everything rotten in Russia as I saw it, all the injustices which are perpetrated in those places and in those circumstances where justice is most required of a man; I decided to hold everything up to ridicule at once.

There is hardly a single man who won't become him (Khlestikov) at least once in his lifetime – the only point is that he'll change back again and carry on as though it never happened.

RUSSIA

I do not rule Russia; ten thousand clerks do.

I cannot permit that any individual should dare defy my wishes, once he knows what they are.

Tsar Nicholas I

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the peasant villages away from the centres of education and enlightenment, the police are the omnipresent and omniscient regulators of all human conduct – a sort of incompetent bureaucratic substitute for divine providence.

George Kennan, American diplomat

The only thing that made the tsarist system tolerable and workable was the easy-going slackness of the typical official; if the rules had been applied with teutonic thoroughness the machinery would simply have seized up ... the same has been true of the centrally planned Soviet Union, which can only live and breathe by ignoring the plan and resorting to the ancient tradition of greasing the wheels with favours and bribes.

Edward Crankshaw, historian and journalist

Yes, we took, of course we took – who is not a sinner in the eyes of the Lord, who is not guilty before the Tsar? But, tell me, is it better to accept no bribes and work badly? When you take bribes, work becomes easier, more exciting.

M E Saltykov, Russian civil servant and satirist

THE COMMENTATORS

Gogol appeals to the secret depth of the human soul where the shadows of other worlds pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships.

Vladimir Nabokov

Gogol was fond of saying that funny things often become sad if you look long enough at them. This transformation of mirth into sadness is the conjuring trick of Gogol's dramatic style.

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OUR NEXT PRODUCTION

HEDDA GABLER

By Henrik Ibsen

A selfish, capricious woman who manipulates all around her or a free spirit who ridicules and rebels against the stifling customs of bourgeois society? Ibsen makes no moral judgments: "What I chiefly tried to do was to paint human beings, human emotions and human fate, against a background of some of the conditions and laws of society as it exists today."

Directed by Colin Hickman
Wednesday 17th January to Saturday 20th January 2006
7.45pm Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre
Box Office : 020 8866 7075

ABOUT PROSCENIUM

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