

PROSCENIUM

Old-World

By Alexei Arbuzov

Translated by Ariadne Nicolaeff

Old-World

Thursday 21st to Saturday 23rd October 2021
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Old-World

The Cast

Rodion Nikolayevich.....	Mike Williams
Lidya Vasilyevna.....	Isabelle Cartwright
Directed by	David Pearson
Assistant Director.....	Crystal Anthony
Stage Management.....	Crystal Anthony Anne Gerrard
Set and Lighting Design.....	Mike Williams
Sound Design.....	Charles Anthony
Lighting and Sound Operation.....	Mark Sutherland
Properties.....	Angela Evans
Programme Compilation	Mark Sutherland

The action of the play takes place in 1968 on the Gulf of Riga

Scene 1	Her 6th day, a sanatorium in Riga
Scene 2	Her 8th day, a small café on the seashore
Scene 3	Her 11th day, outside Domskey Cathedral, Riga
Scene 4	Her 15th day, a hospital on the outskirts of Riga
Interval	
Scene 5	Her 18th day, the rest room in the sanatorium
Scene 6	Her 21st day, a small garden by a restaurant
Scene 7	Her 23rd day, a military cemetery
Scene 8	Her 26th day, outside the sanatorium
Scene 9	Her 31st day, Rodion's country house

There will be one interval of 15 minutes between Scenes 4 and 5

Many thanks to Christopher Witt at Carlo Manzi for Rodion's costume

Words and music for *The Squirrel* and music for *The Circus Song*
by Barry Serjent

Some Notes on Russian History and Culture Referred to in Old-World

The Russian Civil War (1918–20) was a conflict in which the Red Army successfully defended the newly formed Bolshevik government led by Vladimir I. Lenin against various Russian and interventionist anti-Bolshevik armies. There were two main groups of Russian opponents of Lenin, the non-Bolshevik left and the rightist Whites, whose army had survived great hardships in the winter of 1917–18. It was a fine fighting force, though small in numbers.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky was the leading poet of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and of the early Soviet period.

Sergei Alexandrovich Esenin was a Russian lyric poet. He is one of the most popular and well-known Russian poets of the 20th century.

Vsevolod Yemilyevich Meyerhold was a Russian theatrical producer, director, and actor whose provocative experiments in non-realistic theatre made him one of the seminal forces in modern theatre. Although he embraced the Russian Revolution of 1917, his fiercely individualistic temperament and artistic eccentricity brought reproach and condemnation from Soviet critics. He was accused of mysticism and neglect of Socialist Realism. Meyerhold refused to submit to the constraints of artistic uniformity and defended the artist's right to experiment.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was the economic policy of the government of the Soviet Union from 1921 to 1928, representing a temporary retreat from its previous policy of extreme centralization and doctrinaire socialism. Its measures included the return of most agriculture, retail trade, and small-scale light industry to private ownership and management while the state retained control of heavy industry, transport, banking, and foreign trade. The peasantry were allowed to own and cultivate their own land, while paying taxes to the

state. The NEP reintroduced a measure of stability to the economy and allowed the Soviet people to recover from years of war, civil war, and governmental mismanagement. The small businessmen and managers who flourished in this period became known as NEP men.

The NEP was dogged by the government's chronic inability to procure enough grain supplies from the peasantry to feed its urban work force. In 1928–29 these grain shortages prompted Joseph Stalin, by then the country's paramount leader, to forcibly eliminate the private ownership of farmland and to collectivise agriculture under the state's control, thus ensuring the procurement of adequate food supplies for the cities in the future. This abrupt policy change, which was accompanied by the destruction of several million of the country's most prosperous private farmers, marked the end of the NEP. It was followed by the reimposition of state control over all industry and commerce in the country by 1931.

The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, usually known as **Komsomol**, was a political youth organization in the Soviet Union, sometimes described as the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), although it was officially independent and referred to as "the helper and the reserve of the CPSU". It was established in urban areas in 1918 and was the final stage of three youth organizations with members up to age 28, graduated at 14 from the Young Pioneers, and at nine from the Little Octobrists.

Translator

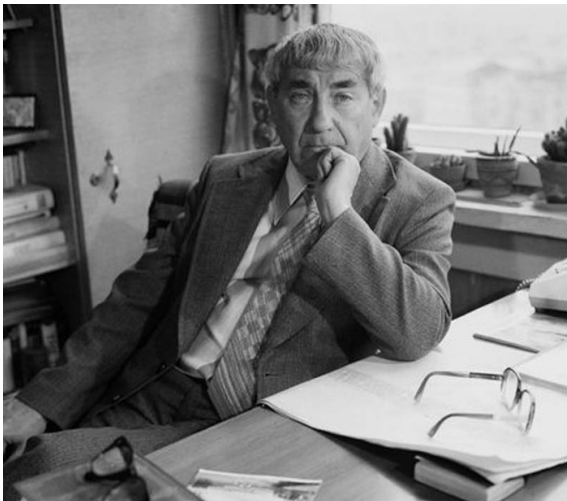
Ariadne Nicolaeff (1915-2001) was a leading translator of Russian plays. Titles include *Chance Visitor* (Watford Palace Theatre, 1984), *Confessions at Night* (Nottingham, 1968), *Do You Turn Somersaults?*, *Five Evenings*, *A Month in the Country*, *Old-World* (Aldwych Theatre, 1976), *The Promise* (Oxford, 1966) and Chekhov's *The Seagull*, which premiered in London in 1964.

Director's Note

In the summer of 1980 I was invited by Masqueraders Theatre Club to play Rodion in this gentle and deeply moving love story, set in and around a sanatorium on the Baltic Sea coast, tracing the growth of a relationship between two extraordinary human beings. It was a deeply moving experience that has stayed with me since.

Just over a year ago I offered to direct a production of it for Proscenium, which was scheduled to be presented in June 2020. The advent of Covid-19, the Lockdown in spring of 2020, the consequent closure of theatres, Lockdown 2 in the autumn of 2020 all conspired against our achieving this. However, with a cast of only two it has been possible to rehearse via video link as a means of getting towards a performance-ready production, once we were able again to get access to physical rehearsal space. It has been an unique challenge for the whole production team, and I am delighted that we are finally able to present the fruits of our labour to a live audience.

I am deeply grateful to every member of the team for their skill and enthusiastic support through trying times. I was particularly pleased to be able to use the song lyrics and music originally composed for the 1980 Masqueraders production, thus completing the 40-year circle.



Alexei Arbuzov

Alexei Arbuzov – A Chronology

- 1908 Born Moscow. Orphaned aged ten, after the Revolution he wandered the country homeless until taken in by his aunt
- 1922 Hired as an extra at the Marinski Theatre, St Petersburg
- 1925 Studied acting at Drama School, only formal education
- 1928 Began directing in Leningrad. Organized touring theatre groups, ran literary section of first Kolkhoz theatre
- 1930 Wrote Class, his first of over 30 plays
- 1934 Wrote Six Lovers, his first comedy
- 1936 Wrote The Long Road
- 1938 Wrote Tanya, a play always in performance since it was written during the Stalin purges. Founded the Moscow Studio Theatre.
- 1941-44 Toured shows for front line troops
- 1943 Wrote A Little House in a Suburb
- 1947 Wrote Meeting Youth
- 1953 Wrote European Holocaust
- 1954 Wrote The Years of Wandering, his favourite play
- 1958 Wrote The Twelfth Hour, British premiere in Oxford in 1964
- 1959 Wrote It Happened in Irkutsk, premiere in Sheffield
- 1960 Wrote The Lost Son
- 1965 Wrote The Promise, first staged in Britain at the Oxford Playhouse (1966), and transferred to London and New York
- 1967 Wrote Confessions at Night, followed by The Choice and The Happy Days of an Unhappy Man
- 1970 Wrote Once Upon a Time
- 1975 Wrote An Old-Fashioned Comedy, his last play. Premieres in London as Old-World with Peggy Ashcroft and Anthony Quayle, and in New York as Do You Turn Somersaults? with Mary Martin and Quayle. Both productions used the same translation.
- 1975-86 Continued to direct and train actors in the Soviet Union.
- 1986 Died April 20th

RIP

We have lost three members of Proscenium since we last performed at the Compass in early 2020. We mourn them and extend our sympathies to their families and friends.



Jevan Morris

Jevan joined Proscenium relatively recently, appearing in *Judgement Day* in 2012. He directed two plays for us, *Playhouse Creatures* and *Otherwise Engaged*, and will perhaps be remembered most of all by Proscenium audiences for his performance as Teddy Brewster (aka Teddy Roosevelt) in *Arsenic and Old Lace*.



Michael Gerrard

Michael Gerrard first appeared for Proscenium in 1974 in *Trelawney of the Wells* and continued acting in and directing plays for us for nearly forty years. He directed seventeen times, more than any other Proscenium member in our history, including plays by Brecht, Chekhov, Coward, O'Neill and Pinter. In 1979 he directed Arbuzov's *The Promise*. He also played leading roles, including the title role in *Richard III*, Jaques in *As You Like It*, Wackford Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*.



Sam Thornton

Sam was a member of Proscenium for more than sixty years, and appeared in plays for nearly fifty, starting in 1956 with *King Lear*. Originally joining us to work backstage, he became a valuable company member onstage as well. His skills in acrobatics and dance (Sam was a well-known practitioner at home and abroad of (Rudolf) Laban's Art of Movement philosophy and practise) were used by directors many times. His many and varied roles over the years included Iago in *Othello*, Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*, John in *Close the Coalhouse Door*, Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Ariel in *The Tempest*, the latter two parts particularly demonstrating his dance and movement skills.

Our Next Production

The Memory of Water

By Shelagh Stephenson

After years of separation three sisters return to the family's Yorkshire home for their mother's funeral. As they revisit their past it becomes clear that their memories are both subjective and unreliable, exposing hidden lies, self-betrayal and personal, unresolved crises.

Their mother's death impacts on the sisters in different ways but each is forced to face unsettling and often poignant home truths that challenge their current lifestyles and ambitions.

A warm, well-observed, often hilarious but strangely unnerving play.

Directed by Janet Harrison

Wednesday 26th to Saturday 29th January 2022, 7:45pm

Compass Theatre, Ickenham
Box Office : 01895 250 615

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week in Harrow for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Ben Morris

Chair : David Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk