

## **Pro-stsenium**

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**Title of the article** - What an incredible ratatouille!

*The Theatre on Vasilevsky premiered a new play "My dear Mathilde" based on the piece written by an American play writer Israel Horovitz, directed by John Pepper. The rehearsal period was not easy, simple because of the fact that the director is used to thinking in terms of big cinematographic categories, close ups, paying attention to details, sometimes hardly visible on a big stage...*

People involved in the play production recall a moment when they needed to bring a certain type of sausage hermetically packed, so no one could guess what this was. And also the director actively used video projections in between the scenes (footage by Tatiana Mishina) and voluminous music passages... Working with actors was no different from the regular process, only it went together with constant presence of Ivan Pavlutchenko - John's interpreter.

We asked the director of the play John Pepper to describe the peculiarities of the process:

- "Years ago when I was becoming a director, I tended to understand all the stages of actors' transformation. I studied in a studio in Los Angeles and regularly travelled from the USA where I lived that time to Italy, where I played in low-budget movies and television series. I am not an actor, but this experience taught me much about actors and what they feel, how vulnerable they are and how heavy is the responsibility that they carry regardless whether in it cinema or theatre.

I am often asked about different spheres of art, in which I tend to express myself. In spite of the fact that they are all different, I do not differentiate them: the main object of my work is a human being first of all. I am interested in beauty and fragility of a person next to me, I love the sense of abundant life, just like deep loneliness, which becomes more and more powerful.

I never make decisions whether to direct a play if I do not feel my personal connection with the material. Sometimes this connection is clear from the very beginning, sometimes it develops with time and rehearsal process. In this particular case there is a story behind.

In the late 80-s I had a chance to work with Horowitz, when I was producing a movie for Warner Brothers in Hollywood. As it sometimes happens with projects in Hollywood, the movie was never released though, however I noted the talent of this writer, his ability to structure the text and his wonderful dialogs. So when I received this wonderful opportunity to direct the play and got immediately interested. And when I found out that this all will happen in Saint Petersburg, I was blown away. Once visited the city, I dreamt of coming back!

I understood this offer as a challenge. I am a very responsible, pedantic person, when it comes to directing. I treat each phrase, each word with attention and I know how this all should sound like. So it was a challenge which I really should go for right now, when I am somewhat older than fifty. In my opinion this age is the beginning of a great period of an artist's life.

The ingredients are incredible - American playwright, events take place in Paris where I lived for 20 years, Russian actors directed by an Italian director... I can imagine, the French would say: "What an impossible ratatouille!"

This story is about a very selfish lady, charming towards everybody, but her own child, this play is about children who never knew parental affection, which they desperately needed, and about children who felt lonely throughout their lives. This play tells about mothers with no maternal instinct and weak fathers unable to act like men. This is a story about passion and finally love, which was found in the end of life. I am familiar with such pain and tribulations, just like I am very well acquainted with a sarcastic style of the main characters of the play, which they make use of to protect themselves.

I always dreamt to work with Russian actors, moreover in the beginning of my career I studied the Stanislavsky's system. I was hoping to experience this system, so to say - straight from the source. One can try pasta all over the world and never get a chance to do it in Italy. But I am lucky. This is great pleasure for me to work with such great cast - Elena Rakhlenko, Dmitry Vorobiev, Natalia Kruglova. The depth and talent of Dmitry - these are like treasures from Ali Baba's cave - there is everything. Elena's experience, her dignity and nobility towards her partners, her ability to listen are so great, that they made me run to our rehearsals and see what the new day is going to give us. Natalia's sense of humor and ability to orient quickly. All these make this cast a dream team! So I was professional with them and they were professional with me."