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Title of the article - "The director John Pepper presents a premier in Saint Petersburg"

The St. Petersburg Theater on Vasilevsky presents a premier on April 30 and May 1. A play by the American playwright Israel Horovitz "My dear Matilda" directed by John Pepper (Italy - USA).

John Pepper - well-known in the West director, actor and photographer. He was born in an American family living in Italy. He directed in theatres in France, Italy, Sweden, USA. He got the chance to experience theater work with the great Italian playwright Eduardo De Filippo, and movie-making process - with a well-known American film director George Roy Hill.

On the eve of the opening night the correspondent of RG visited the theater and had a talk with the director.

John, how did you find yourself directing in the theater on Vasilevsky?

John Pepper: I got a call my French agent, who said there was an opportunity to direct Israel Horovitz' play in Saint Petersburg. She said two ultimate key-words for me: St. Petersburg and Horowitz. I got immediately interested. I have been to the city couple times before, I fell in love with it, with its light, citizens. I was invited here by Marina Dzhigarkhanyan, Armen Dzhigarkhanyan's sister, curator of exhibition of my photographs in "Manege" ...

Talking about Horovitz, I know his works pretty well. About 20 years ago I was producing movies in Hollywood, and he was writing scripts.

There is also the third reason for my visit - opportunity to work with Russian actors. I dreamed about it. I've seen them play and just admired it - they're awesome, wonderful. And I'm known as an actor's director. And here I am. I gave up my life in other parts of the world: I should have made a show at a festival in Avignon, had a job in New York, Paris ...

Having read the play "My dear Matilda," I was captured by this drama, the characters started talking to me. I never get to stage or direct anything up until the moment when I start feeling connected with the story. I have read a novel about a man who is broke, he arrives to Paris because he has inherited an apartment and there he discovered that he needs to wait for the death of a lady living in it. The situations seems to me incredible. I quite liked the fact that the main character is an American, and he appears in Paris (here two cultures collide). I have been living in France for 20 years, I knew these people, their apartments, streets. I lived in America as well, and I know where this man comes from.

It was as well important for me that this is both drama and a comedy. Just like Chekhov's works. This is a story about parents and children. And I guess we are all children. This is the basis of the play.

And how do you like working with the St. Petersburg actors?

John Pepper: It's an absolute pleasure! I have the opportunity to work with a person whom I consider the most gifted actor - Dmitry Vorobiev. If I had a magic wand, I would have transferred Dmitry to the stage of the National Theatre in London or theatres of Broadway - and would be enjoying his art. (I've never told him this). From his CV I learned that he played Cyrano de Bergerac. This role was greatly

performed by Gerard Depardieu, Steve Martin in movies. And I imagined Dmitry torn apart by playing Cyrano. It is fantastic! He is able to do everything ...

Elena Rakhlenko is a terrific actress. She possesses purity and honesty, she has got a big heart. The way she sees her role captures me. Her character is strong, but it is so far from herself ... While working we are discussing many things and she sometimes admits that she thought about them quite differently. As a director I am hard on the actors. Certainly not in a way that I am yelling on them all the time. I demand a lot from them, trying to get the highest level. Sometimes I push Elena hard, and when she gives it - that is when I say "Wow!" It's the same as to watch the flower blossom.

The third actress - Natasha Kruglova. She is a strong, intelligent lady. It's exciting to observe how she grows and develops from rehearsal to rehearsal.

Are you worried about Saint Petersburg aisle sitters?

John Pepper: had no idea that "My dear Matilda" was shown in Moscow, in the Moscow Art Theatre. However it is not important for me at all. My goal is to create the best I can, to be as honest as possible, to get into the vision that I have inside. When I succeed - this is wonderful! This is my journey. The critics have to do their job. They either like it or not. See, I am an Italian director, I was born in Italy. Russians and Italians are pretty common. But I am also an American, and so I hope that a cultural bridge can be positive. Artists stay artists everywhere. There is no political motive in this story. It is about people, like I said, about parents and their children. Truly a mother in Zanzibar, in France or in Russia is the mother and a child - is the child.

Information from "RG"

Israel Horowitz - is one of the American playwrights whose plays get staged all over the world. In his plays starred Richard Dreyfuss, Al Pacino, Gerard Depardieu, Diane Keaton. He is a scriptwriter of "Strawberry Statement" (Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1970), "Author! Author!" (Al Pacino in the title role), "Sunshine" (European Film Academy Award for Best Screenplay), "James Dean" (the film was nominated for an "Emmy"). Horowitz wrote the script, directed and played the role in the movie "Three weeks after the Paradise", released in America in 2002 with great success. Winner of many prestigious theater awards.