

THEATRE-ON-PODOL: KIEV, UKRAINE REPERTOIRE AND PERFORMANCE STYLE

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In August 1991, I spent ten days in Kiev as part of a global exchange project established between my academic institution and the Theatre-on-Podol. Under the leadership of artistic director Vitaly Malakhov, this theatre tucked away in a corner of the oldest section of Kiev has become the heart of the Podol District and the center of its artistic rejuvenation. It divides its performances between a tiny black box with a minuscule stage and a larger proscenium theatre seating approximately two hundred patrons.

The exchange project encompassed several phases. Following the first meeting between members of our School of Fine and Performing Arts and the Podol staff, a colleague and I visited Kiev to introduce an American playwright to them. Though their repertoire is varied, extensive, and international, and includes both classical and contemporary works, they do not produce American plays. Hence their interest in our visit. We decided to use Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* as a point of departure for our joint exploration of American theatre. Miller's international status as a playwright placed him on equal footing with other writers in their repertoire.

Though we spent the better part of six days discussing, improvising, and eventually staging a small segment of the play, our sharing of Miller's work was only a part of the global exchange. Every evening, following the day's rehearsal, the Podol company presented a selection from its repertoire, sometimes a complete play, sometimes a fragment of a play. Both types of viewing experiences provided an excellent vantage point from which to evaluate the breadth and depth of their work. For an audience of only five to ten people (a few staff members and actors in addition to the two of us) the theatre presented a "complete" event—sets, lights, and costumes. Their willingness to share their work, regardless of the time and effort involved, served to demonstrate the truth in their statement that, "theatre is not the most important event in our lives; it is our life."

During our visit, we saw the work of Shakespeare, Pinter, Beckett, Strindberg, Lorca, Dürrenmatt, fragments of Sophocles and Brecht, a production based on the writings of a contemporary Russian poet, and an avant-garde piece based on Dumas's *Camille*. In addition, during their tour of the United States two months later in October 1991, we were able to view full-length performances of *A Midsummer Night's*