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Varda Studio brings "All Roads Lead to the Kurski Station," an adaptation of "Moscow Circles" by Venedikt Yerofeyev, to HERE October 9 to 21.

Emil Varda, a Polish dissident & theater maker, loosely adapts Russia's first postmodernist novel for a three-person ensemble.

WHERE AND WHEN:

October 9 to 21, 2018

HERE Arts Center, 145 Avenue of the Americas, NYC 10013 (enter on Dominick, one block south of Spring St.)

Presented by Varda Studio. This production at HERE is a part of SubletSeries@HERE: a curated rental program, which provides artists with subsidized space and equipment as well as technical support.

Subway: C/E to Spring, 1 to Houston

Tue-Sat @ 7:00 pm, Sundays @ 2:00 pm

Company's website: www.vardastudio.org

\$25 gen. adm. Buy tickets: <http://here.org/show/kurski> or call 212-352-3101

Running time: 70 minutes. Critics are invited to all performances.

Photos are available for download at: <https://www.vardastudio.org/gallery>

NEW YORK, September 13 -- Varda Studio, a newly formed avant-garde theater company, will perform its "All Roads Lead to the Kurski Station," a theatrical version of "Moscow Circles" by Venedikt Yerofeyev that is adapted and directed by Emil Varda, from October 9 to 21 as part of the Sublet Series at HERE, 145 Avenue of the Americas.

Varda Studio (www.vardastudio.org), founded by Emil Varda, Artistic Director, Reed Ridgley, Producing Director, and Mia Vallet, Associate Artistic Director, is dedicated to highly stylized, politically and intellectually challenging performances and art happenings. Emil Varda was a dissident intellectual and theater maker in Communist Poland and endured harsh imprisonment there before emigrating to NYC in 1983. He produced two shows and acted in several more here before "reality and economics" pushed him into the restaurant business around 1988. There he prospered, becoming co-owner of The Waverly Inn and Beatrice Inn. Last year, he began his return to theater and art with a group of like-minded, passionate local artists and performers. The troupe challenges conventional forms without surrendering to sentimentality or postmodern nihilism.

"All Roads Lead to the Kurski Station" is a Rabelasian, anti-theater adaptation of "Moscow Circles," a poetic book by Russian/Soviet dissident and satirist Venedikt Yerofeyev that is now known as the first postmodern novel in Russian. It follows a poet-drunkard called Vienia as he traverses Soviet Moscow in an attempt to catch a train to visit his beloved in the distant suburb of Petuskhi. Along the way, he is haunted by fantastic visions and two mysterious women who are seemingly determined to frustrate his plans.

The play rejects naturalistic forms of narration and storytelling; it is typical of the movement which is now identified with works of Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, The Living Theater and Bread and Puppet Theater. We are offered a sequence of maniacal fever dreams exploring Soviet life through the lens of Vienia's troubled mind. Experience and emotion fuse with references from religion, art and history in a psychotic chorus, creating poetic and surreal images and hallucinatory episodes reminiscent of the strange logic of the unconscious.

In the novel, the alcoholic Vienia has spent his last rubles on food and drink for the journey. On the train, he spins long monologues about history, philosophy and politics. Sleeping through his stop at the Utopian city of Petushki, he re-awakens on a train headed back to Moscow. Emil Varda frames Vienia's story as a sort of Russian Odyssey in which, unlike Homer's tale, Ithaca does not exist because Russia lives by the past and the

future only. "All Roads Lead to the Kurski Station" therefore provides an urgent warning and bitter prophecy in these times, when Cold War tensions are revived, alienation is widespread and authoritarianism is rising across the globe. In Vienya's imaginings, we see the nihilistic present that sometimes afflicts Chekhov's characters, which they escape with rapturous visions of a brave new Russia. But for Vienya, both the Russian Revolution and the Chekhovian dreams are dead.

You can see the door opening to what historian Timothy Snyder, in his new book "The Road to Unfreedom," calls the politics of eternity. It's a mindset which places the nation in a cyclical state of victimhood, where progress leads only to doom, civic responsibility erodes, politicians deny truth and government sustains itself by defending against external threats which it makes up as it goes along. The Russians got to the politics of eternity first. They couldn't teach it to the Americans until the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath.

Don't take this politics of eternity stuff as Varda Studio's interpretation, though. The company writes on its website that their stylistic fusion of European avant-garde theatre, performance art, Dadaist aesthetics, satire, and montage invites the viewer to experiment freely within the intellectual and emotional opulence of Vienya's phantasmagoria. In an interview with Ken Scrudato for Blackbook, Emil Varda put a personal slant on the play, saying "Vienya is not just a character from Soviet Russia exclusively. He is a universal everyman, one of those among us who needs help and human kindness. Vienya is the last poet philosopher whose biggest tragedy was a fatal lack of love. His journey shows how determined he was trying to reach his goals and how painful that journey was. He ended up how he did because society and even God turned its back on him."

In saying that, Mr. Varda may have been not-so-subtly hinting that his adaptation, like Yerofeyev's postmodernist prose poem itself, is semi-autobiographical. In an article published on the website of Pointy Snout, a caviar brand, Varda told interviewer Sasha Haines-Stiles that some time ago, he was in the same situation as Vienya but he got lucky--he was at the place where you can still take the train back. He switched trains and is now here to tell the story. Varda performed his own one-man show version of "All Roads Lead to the Kurski Station" in the early 1980s at 13th Street Theater. His acting training in Poland and his vision of theater were--and are still--very far from the mainstream. Before his economic exile into the restaurant business, he also co-adapted "Fatal Lack of Color" by Bruno Schultz and acted in a few plays, notably "Lotto" by the late Glenn O'Brien at La MaMa.

Vienya is played by Elliott Morse. The two women are played by Rivers Duggan and Mia Vallet. Lighting design is by David Palmer. Music is supervised and composed by Scott Griffin. Production Stage Manager is Christopher Denver.

Yerofeyev's book was written around 1969 and circulated in *samizdat* before it was finally published in Israel in 1973 and in Paris in 1977. It was finally published in the Soviet Union in 1989 during the period of Perestroika. Yerofeyev died of throat cancer in 1990.

"All Roads Lead to the Kurski Station" had a developmental run May 10 to June 24, 2018 (28 performances) at the newly created East Village Playhouse. The HERE production is a part of SubletSeries@HERE: a curated rental program, which provides artists with subsidized space and equipment, as well as technical support.

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