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'Radio Culture' at TUTA Theatre: Conjuring day in the 'normal life' of a young Berlarusian

Submitted by [Hedy Weiss](#) on Oct 27, 2018 – 9:26 pm

Kevin V. Smith plays Volodya, who just wants a normal life, in the U.S. premiere of 'Radio Culture,' a riveting play out of Eastern Europe. (Photos by Austin D. Oie)

Review: "Radio Culture" by Maxim Dosko at the TUTA Theatre Company through Dec. 2. ★★★★★

By [Hedy Weiss](#)

For more than two decades, TUTA Theatre Company has forged its reputation by introducing audiences to unusual theatrical fare drawn largely from Eastern and Western European playwrights. The company has been more or less itinerant. But for the next month or so, if you venture into its newest, tiny (25-seat) storefront in a hidden corner of the Ravenswood neighborhood, you will spend 70 absolutely riveting minutes experiencing the U.S. premiere of Maxim Dosko's "Radio Culture."

The play, newly translated and adapted by Natalya Fedorova and Amber Robinson, ingeniously directed by Robinson, and brilliantly performed by Kevin

Worth A Visit



Role Playing: Actors Inside Their Characters

Abdullah Khan in 'Blood and Gifts' –

Kareem Bandyaly

Aggie in 'A Catered Affair' – Rebecca

Finnegan

Ahab in 'Moby Dick' – Christopher Donahue

Alice in 'Still Alice' – Eva Barr

Alice in 'The Dance of Death' – Shannon

Cochran

All seven characters in 'The Amish Project'

– Sadieh Rifai

Anna in 'City of Dreadful Night' – Justine C.

Turner

Anya Botvinnik in 'A Walk in the Woods' –

Janet Ulrich Brooks

Arley in 'The March' – Ian Barford

Benjamin Stone in 'Follies' – Brent Barrett

Beth in 'Mud Blue Sky' – Natalie West

Bev/Kathy in 'Clybourne Park' – Kirsten

Fitzgerald

Blanche DuBois in 'A Streetcar Named

Desire' – Tracy Michelle Arnold

Bo Decker in 'Bus Stop' – Michael Stegall

Caroline in 'Luna Gale' – Mary Beth Fisher

Catherine in 'Proof' – Chaon Cross

Catherine Parr in 'The Last Wife' – AnJi

White

Charlesetta in 'East Texas Hot Links' – Tyla

Abercumbie

Clown in 'Burning Bluebeard' – Dean Evans

V. Smith, was the recipient of the "Best Experimental Writing" award in the 2014 International Contest of Contemporary Drama of the fabled Belarus Free Theatre. And if that sounds too distant, esoteric or obviously avant-garde, rest assured that the genius of Dosko's play is its everyman-like accessibility.

In fact, "Radio Culture" might easily have been subtitled "A day in the life of Volodya, a 30-year old construction foreman." Volodya works in a small but burgeoning



town outside Minsk, the capital of Belarus – a country that declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, but since 1994 has been led by Alexander Lukashenko, often referred to as "Europe's last dictator" (even if he has considerable competition for that title these days).

Intelligent, hard-working, intensely stressed and painfully aware of the social, intellectual and financial constrictions of his existence, Volodya lives in a modest apartment in Minsk with his parents and younger sister. He has a car, is more or less a loner, and spends a great deal of time dealing with issues involving his employees, many of whom are "from the provinces" and are housed in a dormitory. Among these men are some diligent workers, but a good number of the others are either sloppy or stupid, engaged in petty theft, or, worst of all, serious alcoholics.

Clytemnestra in 'Agamemnon' – Sandra Marquez

Davies in 'The Caretaker' – Bill Norris

Donel in 'The Opponent' – Kamal Angelo

Bolden

Eddie Carbone in 'A View From the Bridge'

– Ramón Camín

George in 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'

– Brian Parry

Gruach in 'Dunsinane' – Siobhan Redmond

Harry Hope in 'The Iceman Cometh' –

Stephen Ouimette

Helen in 'The Cripple of Inishmaan' – Baize

Buzan

Ian in 'The Herd' – Francis Guinan

Jimmy Porter in 'Look Back in Anger' –

Joseph Wiens

John Starr in 'Charles Ives Take Me Home'

– Dave Belden

Julia Child in 'To Master the Art' – Karen

Woditsch

Julianna in 'The Other Place' – Lia D.

Mortensen

Julio in 'The _____ With the Hat' – Gary

Perez

Larry in 'The Dream of the Burning Boy' –

Darrell W. Cox

Lincoln in 'The Heavens Are Hung in Black'

– Lawrence Grimm

Marc Antony in 'Julius Caesar' – Dion

Johnstone

Mark in 'Accidentally, Like a Martyr' – Steve

Haggard

Masha in 'Three Sisters' – Lindsey Gavel

Mick in 'The Seedbed' – Adam Bitterman

Miriam in 'The Good Book' – Hollis Resnik

Mr. van Daan in 'The Diary of Anne Frank' –

Lance Baker

Musa in 'Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo'

– Anish Jethmalani

Oliver Kilbourn in 'The Pitmen Painters' –

Dan Waller

Puck in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' –

Cristina Panfilio



Boxed-in Volodya (Smith) dreams about change, then fears the pitfalls.

When he is not working, Volodya, who tells us he just wants “a normal life,” is constantly thinking about possible ways of improving his situation. He wants change, but very quickly sees all the pitfalls and futility of his plans. Meanwhile, he browses the Internet in search of deals on better jeans and sneakers, forever alert to companies that sell fakes. He looks forward to the hot lunches his mother packs for him, which he invariably eats in the solitude of his car, where he caps things off with his favorite treat, a Snickers bar. He wonders about why stores in Minsk stock expensive German cookies when those made in Belarus are just as delicious, and cheaper. He worries about the over-development going on around Minsk. And he notes that he always keeps his money in foreign currency.

And the radio? Well, he tells us he recently happened upon a station he has come to like very much – one with classical music and news. He feels it has changed him in some way. But the response he gets when he tells a few arty friends about his “discovery” (a response I will not divulge here) stuns him.

Queen Elizabeth in 'Elizabeth Rex' – Diane D'Aquila

Queen Katherine in 'Henry VIII' – Ora Jones

Richard Harkin in 'The Seafarer' – Brad Armacost

Richard in 'Richard III' – James Ridge

Sam in 'The Flick' – Danny McCarthy

Serafina in 'The Rose Tattoo' – Eileen Niccolai

Seta in 'Beast on the Moon' – Sophia Menendian

Sylvia in 'Broken Glass' – Jacqueline Grandt

Terry in 'If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet' – Shane Kenyon

Trinket Dugan in 'The Mutilated' – Mierka Girten

Victor Franz in 'The Price' – Chuck Spencer

West in 'Two Trains Running' – A.C. Smith

Witch in 'Into the Woods' – Hillary Marren

Closed Shows 2015-2016

★★ Bruise Easy at American Theater Co. thru Feb. 14

★★★ 2666 at Goodman Theatre thru March 20

★★★ King Lear produced by Belarus Free Theatre at Chicago Shakespeare Theater thru Feb. 14

★★★ Mothers and Sons at Northlight Theatre thru Feb. 27

★★★ Posh at Steep Theatre extended thru March 26

★★★ Satchmo at the Waldorf at Court Theatre extended thru Feb. 14

★★★ The Realization of Emily Linder at Redtwist Theatre thru May 22

★★★★ Der Rosenkavalier at Lyric Opera of Chicago thru March 13

★★★★ Gem of the Ocean at Court Theatre thru Oct. 11

★★★★ Jerusalem at Profiles Theatre thru May 22



Sullen laborers (Wain Parham, Huy Nguyen) and sorely tested construction foreman Volodya struggle to get along in this existential gem of a play.

Volodya tries to run a collegial workplace, but he also engages in a great deal of introspection when he is not inspecting his sullen laborers' work, demanding corrections, keeping up with paperwork, dealing with complaints, and, when absolutely pushed to the limit, firing those who have taken him to the breaking point.

The narrow oblong room in which "Radio Culture" is performed is beyond bare bones, with spot-on minimalism by set designer Eleanor Kahn (plasterboard walls, thick plastic curtains and nothing but a scaffold on wheels as the powerfully evocative movable scenery). And this is complemented by Keith Parham's bare-bulb lighting and the excellent sound design of Jeffrey Levin.

★★★★ Nabucco at Lyric Opera of Chicago
thru Feb. 12

★★★★ Romeo and Juliet at Lyric Opera of
Chicago thru March 19

★★★★ Sunset Baby at TimeLine Theatre
thru April 10

★★★★ The Drawer Boy at Redtwist
Theatre thru Feb. 28

★★★★ The Flick at Steppenwolf Theatre
thru May 8

★★★★ The Marriage of Figaro at Lyric
Opera of Chicago thru Oct. 24

★★★★ The Matchmaker at Goodman
Theatre thru April 10

★★★★ The Mutilated at A Red Orchid
Theatre extended thru March 13

★★★★★ 'Cinderella' at Lyric Opera of
Chicago thru Oct. 30

★★★★★ Agamemnon at Court thru Dec. 6

★★★★★ Arcadia at Writers Theatre thru
May 1

★★★★★ Cabaret presented by Broadway
in Chicago at PrivateBank Theatre thru
Feb. 21

★★★★★ Death of a Streetcar Named
Virginia Woolf at Writers Theatre thru July
31

★★★★★ Long Day's Journey Into Night at
Court Theatre thru April 10

★★★★★ Mary Page Marlowe at
Steppenwolf Theatre thru June 5

★★★★★ Othello at Chicago Shakespeare
Theater thru April 10

★★★★★ The King and I at Lyric Opera of
Chicago thru May 22

★★★★★ The Tempest at Chicago
Shakespeare Theater thru Nov. 8

★★★★★ Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? at
Redtwist Theatre extended thru Oct. 31

Closed Shows 2014-2015

★★ First Wives Club presented by
Broadway in Chicago at the Oriental
Theatre thru March 29



Smith does an astonishing job of capturing Volodya's painfully resigned (yet hope-against-hope) state of mind.

Maxim Dosko's impeccable writing is minimalist, too, but just droll, sardonic, detailed and depressive enough to conjure Volodya's world view, which is told entirely in first person. And Smith, pale, rail thin, and bristlingly smart, does an astonishing job of capturing his character's alternately agitated, depressed, sanguine, angry, intense, and painfully resigned (yet hope-against-hope) state of mind. This is a tour de force performance of the most impeccable subtlety, marked by a display of deep understanding and meticulous control.

Although Smith is the only actor to speak, the presence of two of his workers – plasterers played by Wain Parham and Huy Nguyen – is of crucial importance. These two men, friends and fellow alcoholics, never utter a word, but their faces and body language say everything about their rage and despair, and make them perfect foils for Volodya.

- ★★ That Hopey Changey Thing and
- ★★★★ Sorry at TimeLine Theatre thru April 19

- ★★ The Who & The What at Victory Gardens thru July 12

- ★★★ Airline Highway at Steppenwolf Theatre thru Feb.11

- ★★★★ Carousel at Lyric Opera of Chicago thru May 3

- ★★★ Grand Concourse at Steppenwolf Theatre thru Aug. 30

- ★★★ Isaac's Eye at Writers Theatre extended thru Dec. 21

- ★★★★ King Lear at Chicago Shakespeare Theater thru Nov. 9

- ★★★ Pippin presented by Broadway in Chicago at the Cadillac Palace Theatre thru Aug. 9

- ★★★ Pride and Prejudice at American Players Theatre thru Sept. 26

- ★★★ Rapture, Blister, Burn at Goodman Theatre thru Feb. 22

- ★★★ Sondheim on Sondheim, produced by Porchlight Music Theatre at Stage 773 thru March 15

- ★★★ The Cryptogram at Profiles Theatre extended thru Dec. 6

- ★★★ The Humans at American Theater Company thru Feb. 1

- ★★★ The Whaleship Essex produced by Shattered Globe Theatre at Theater Wit thru Oct. 11

- ★★★ Yankee Tavern produced by American Blues Theater at Greenhouse Theater Center thru March 22

- ★★★★ All Our Tragic produced by The Hypocrites at The Den extended thru Aug. 16

- ★★★★ Antigonick produced by Sideshow Theatre at Victory Gardens Theater thru April 5

- ★★★★ Balm in Gilead produced by Griffin Theatre at The Den Theatre thru April 19

- ★★★★ Beast on the Moon at Raven Theatre thru June 6

There are many restraints on life and culture in Belarus these days, with some members of the Belarus Free Theatre (which has produced several of Dosko's plays) now living in exile in Great Britain. But here is the great irony: "Radio Culture" will easily connect to audiences far beyond that country. It is an existential gem, a perfect evocation of modern life that has been writ small but looms large.

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- **Performance location, dates and times:** Details at TheatreInChicago.com

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★★★★ Capriccio at Lyric Opera of Chicago thru Oct. 28

★★★★ Don Giovanni at Lyric Opera of Chicago thru Oct. 29

★★★★ Genius at Profiles Theatre thru May 3

★★★★ Goldfish, produced by Route 66 Theatre at the Greenhouse Theater Center thru July 12

★★★★ Good People at Redtwist Theatre, extended thru Aug. 23

★★★★ Ionesco Suite at Chicago Shakespeare Theater thru Oct.19

★★★★ Martyr at Steep Theatre thru May 23

★★★★ Red at Redtwist Theatre, extended thru March 29

★★★★ Sense & Sensibility at Chicago Shakespeare Theater thru June 14

★★★★ Tannhäuser at Lyric Opera of Chicago thru March 6

★★★★ The American Clock at Redtwist Theatre thru May 17

★★★★ The Night Alive at Steppenwolf Theatre thru Nov. 16

★★★★ The Passenger at Lyric Opera of Chicago thru March 15

★★★★ The Rose Tattoo produced by Shattered Globe Theatre at Theater Wit thru Feb. 28

★★★★ Three Sisters produced by The Hypocrites at The Den Theatre thru June 6

★★★★★ A Streetcar Named Desire at American Players Theatre thru Sept. 5

★★★★★ Accidentally, Like a Martyr at A Red Orchid Theatre, extended thru March 15

★★★★★ An Iliad at American Players Theatre thru Oct. 18

★★★★★ Dunsinane, produced by National Theatre of Scotland at Chicago Shakespeare Theater thru March 22

★★★★★ Moby Dick at Lookingglass Theatre thru Aug. 28