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CHICAGO PHILHARMONIC FESTIVAL: POLAND 2018

WINDY CITY TIMES

Radio Culture by Sean Margaret Wagner 2018-10-31



NOVEMBER 7-11



THE 2018 BLACK & BLUE FILM FESTIVAL WE FALL FOR FILM NOVEMBER 16 - 17, 2018

TICKETS



Kevin V. Smith in Radio Culture, Photo by Austin D. Oie



Authors Maxim Dosko, Natalia Fedorova and Amber Robinson

At TUTA Theatre, 4670 N. Manor Ave. Tickets: TUTATheatre.org; \$20-\$30. Runs through: Dec. 2

TUTA Theatre has concocted one of the most tightly packed, powerful theater experiences from source material that should be the opposite.

Radio Culture, by Maxim Dosko ( translated by Natalia Fedorova and Amber Robinson ), stems from the eastern European "New Drama" movement, hyper-focused on the normalcy we all exhibit. Director Amber Robinson has wisely avoided embellishments with the understanding that a page from this central character's life will be more than enough.

It's 2013 and Volodya ( Kevin V. Smith ) is terribly alone. He is not an eloquent person, nor is he a charming person. He is prone to anxiety and insecurity; he structures his waking hours so that he can withdraw into the hum of a Belarusian national radio program everyone else thinks is old fashioned. The compartments of his life are un-touching and sterile, and it affords him ample time in the company of his endless mundane thoughts.

Lucky for us, we can hear every single one; his observance over the men on his construction site that are prone to drink ( Huy Nguyen and Wain Parham ), his dislike of counterfeit jeans and raisin bread, if he should get his mother a plot of land or a meat grinder for her birthday. He doesn't spare us a single detail, and it feels familiar and foreign at the same time.

His thoughts are so specific they become universal, and so trivial, they encompass whole lives. It's no mistake that we've reached Volodya on this day, when his tether to a quiet existence is down to some measly strands and all the normally comforting things can't walk him back from the verge of tears. "It's not normal to worry so much," he says and fixates so hard on keeping his life pristine, that it gives way to an unspoken concern that his thirtysome years of work has been a waste.



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Smith is still and calm as Volodya, and seems to have his eyes on everyone, including the workmen on his site, and the Chicagoans fidgeting in their seats. He is purposeful and serious, exhibiting the precise judgments he levies on the people who are not there—and you can't help but wonder what he must think of you. Huy Nguyen and Wain Parham join him very tangentially as Dimon and Serjogin, mostly silent, and staring in what could be menace, but really is just a vast unknown. Volodya assumes Dimon and Serjogin are comprised of nothing but disdain and apathy, so we do too, until we are afforded a glimpse behind the curtain.

That's the thing: Volodya may be terribly alone—but so are all of us, and it's a profound experience to hear an internal voice that is not your own.



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