Stage set was constructed and donated by Western Partitions, Inc. Visit their website at:
http://www.westernpartitions.com/
I entered this year’s theater class with anxiety that made me jittery. What is my cast going to be this year? Will they make it? And in the end, I know I will enter this same room in tears, because I won’t want to part with this wonderful cast and crew—so talented and so motivated! To you, my wonderful students and assistants, I owe words of gratitude for this amazing term and for the show that we are all about to see.

In 1943, Evgenii Shvarts, a well-known Soviet playwright, penned his most intriguing play—a parable about the nature of power entitled “The Dragon.” Stalin’s regime was still in place, Russia was at war with the German fascism that ultimately cost it 27 million lives, and the author had little hope to see his drama on stage. When, after the end of the war, one Russian theater did stage “The Dragon,” it was forbidden right after the premiere. It took another 20 years and the political “thaw” of the 1960s to bring the play back to the audience.

I am not sure why I re-read the play last summer: perhaps my then 14-year-old daughter was reading it and I followed suit. The opening scenes of the play, where a young girl had to be given to the Dragon, reminded me of the alleged relationship of the fifty-three-year-old Putin with Alina Kabaeva, a teenage Olympic gymnast, in the early 2000s. The girl’s father, says: “The dragon protects us from others dragons!”—just as the pro-government media claims that Putin prevents nationalists, mafia or Americans from taking over the land. The following scenes evoked further contemporary associations. A lonely knight fighting the system? In 2007, Garri Kasparov, the world chess champion and one of the richest people in the world, attempted an independent campaign and was supposed to be given equal opportunity with Putin to contest him—however, everywhere he tried to hold a rally, the water pipes blew up, fire emergencies arose, or “financial” issues materialized. Our oil magnate, Mikhail Khodorkovskii, gave money to opposition parties and ended up spending a decade in prison for misdemeanor financial crimes on a much smaller scale than Putin’s early 1990s sales of Russian metal in exchange for humanitarian aid that never arrived. In Shvarts’ play, Lancelot is granted, by law, an equal opportunity with the Dragon in the fight. He arrives at the Town Hall to find out it is going to be closed in a few minutes; the townsfolk provide him with a bowl for a helmet, a tray for a shield, and an IOU for a spear. And what about the Mayor turned President who did not want to share the Dragon’s wealth with anyone because this wealth was “already distributed among the best people of the land?” In the same way, the wealth left over after the collapse of the USSR was distributed among thieves and thugs, including Putin and his clique.

I felt almost nauseated by the seemingly endless list of similarities between the Dragon-land and Russia. However, all the names of the play were taken from European history, and of course the parable was not only about Russia. It was about Europe, the US, and every land—every government. That was when I jumped up and began to make notes for the script of the “Put-in Dragon.” Shvarts’ play could be taken up-to-date with just a few strokes.

Julia Frederick is on her second time working with the Russian theatre class and her first time designing for a real show. She is a Theatre major studying Russian and loves this class because it combines two of her interests. Julia is very glad to be a part of this experience and hopes to continue helping out after she graduates this spring. Ни пуха, ни пера!

Nick Ligett works at the University of Oregon Libraries as the coordinator of the Aerial Photography Collection. This is his second year doing the sound effects for the Russian Through Theater play.

David Etchepare is a sophomore at the University of Oregon. He is in charge of lighting for the Russian Through Theater play.

Lisa Shultz Tucker has been intrigued by her Russian heritage since she has was a small child. She graduated from the U of O with a Romance Language degree in 1977 and finally started to learn Russian last year at Lane Community College. She saw the flyer for the class and fell in love with the play. She is crashing the party as a sen-try and a go-fer in costuming.
Erin McNamara is attending the U of O to receive a Bachelor’s Degree in Theatre Arts. She does not know how to speak Russian, but she is happy to be costuming the actors. She is thrilled to be involved with this project and is eager to learn stage terminology and some new phrases in Russian.

Anastasia Savenko-Moore received her MA in Art History from St. Petersburg State University. She is a Graduate Teaching Fellow and MA student in the UO REEES program. She teaches art to children at the Little Owl School of Arts in Eugene. For a number of years, Anastasia has designed beautiful costumes for UO Russian Theatre productions.

Victoria Knudsen is a second year Russian student and has helped with costumes and props this year. Her favorite part about theatre is getting to know so many people and working with them toward one goal.

Lizka Vaintrob is a high school student who likes art and math. She has been helping with the theater for a couple years, mostly with arts, make-up and costume design.

The changes include several areas:

— In the original play, the Dragon is Medieval. Our Dragon is drunk on oil and gas, his skin is puffed with Botox, and his favorite phrase is PUT-IN, always followed by accepting a bribe.

— In the original play, Elsa is a timid girl who falls in love with Lancelot. Our Elsa is a brave gymnast. She does love the Dragon—and later the Mayor—because, unlike the knight-errant, they feed her with caviar, dress her in Prada and Gucci, and make her a member of the parliament.

— Our Lancelot is a foreigner and speaks English, as does one of the Dragon heads, for the sake of bilingualism.

— Our Lancelot represents the shortcomings of the US and Western policies—for, ultimately, it’s a parable about any government.

Strangely, when transferred from 1942 to 2014, the parable becomes much more tragic. Our well-known writer, Fazil Iskander, wrote about Putin’s regime, “It had been easier not to sell one’s soul to the Devil under the Communists because there were enemies, friends, and clear goals; now, when society is a ‘managed democracy’ and the economy is ‘capitalist,’ the rules, boundaries, and ideology are as unclear and blurry as they can be, and so are the morals.”

After all, Putin is just Russia’s everyman. Everywhere in this wealthy land, people take bribes, engage in nepotism, and act as bullies just like their President. Everywhere, women miss a strong, macho husband and father figure Putin positions himself to be.

Russia’s civil society is now represented by the white ribbon bearers who took part in the anti-government manifestations that overtook Moscow in 2011-12. They are mostly young people, middle class and intellectuals—not impoverished lumpens. They do not claim to be the 99%. They just demand that the government of thugs and thieves, along with their KGB style management, go away and take with them the unbelievable inequality and proverbial corruption. They want laws to be reinforced and the civil society built. But numerous questions remain. Is it a rightful thing for the wealthy and educated to stage an uprising in a country where the majority is like the man they fight? And if the statistics have been manipulated and Putin’s support is dwindling, how many people will support him just to be left alone? Elsa’s friends say: “Why is he fighting? If he did not challenge the Dragon, we would have been safely at home eating our "poor girl" buns and crying.” And Charmagne echoes, “We are happy with everything.” For if white ribbons gain momentum and overthrow the regime, what would the change bring? In the castle, Lancelot admits: “I am not the same man I was before.” He proposes to kill the Dragon in everyone, yet the Dragon is not just mean: he falls in love, sympathizes with Lancelot, and he is given probably the most important line in the whole play: “Я что-то забыл сказать... ах да! НЕ БОЙТЕСЬ! = There is something I forgot to say… Ah, yes! DO NOT BE AFRAID!”

Julia Nemirovskaya
Cast in Order of Appearance

Music

Nikolai Valov is an undergraduate freshman majoring in Music. He is directing, arranging, and composing the music to the play. He has enjoyed this opportunity to expand his abilities in composition of music for theater settings.

Toma Sexton is a junior at the U of O, studying for her Bachelor’s Degree in Linguistics. She is in her third year of Russian language study and is also learning French as another branch of her degree. This is her second time working with the play, and this time as well as last time she is in the choir, but has no speaking part in the play. Being in the play has helped with her communication skills with the Russian language, as well as picking up the idioms of Russian people in the U of O community, of which there are many!

Lara Ravitch has been in love with theater since age eight and with Russia and Russian language since age sixteen. She is currently teaching English at the UO American English Institute and she was thrilled to help with directing and editing The Dragon.
Sarah is a junior at the University of Oregon, majoring in Russian, minoring in French. She has been in theater since the age of 3 when she started dancing ballet, before moving over to plays and doing countless productions at Theater in the Grove in Forest Grove. This is her first time back onstage following a four year break. She is very excited to be back acting especially in her first performance in Russian.

Drew Sampson is an Accounting major at the U of O and is graduating in the spring. He has no experience with Russian, and is playing the English-speaking Dragon head. However, he is highly qualified as an actor. In third grade he played a pirate, in fourth grade a dancing Santa, and in fifth grade he had a lead role as a cowboy. After retiring at the top of his game, he has been in retirement until tonight… Enjoy!

Gersh Botvinnik is acting as the little boy in the play. He is eight years old and in the third grade at Adams Elementary School.

Drew Sampson is in the Russian and East European Studies program at the U of O. He became interested in this class because of the Russian immersion aspects of this course. He is very excited about The Dragon because of its ability to satirically poke fun at the social and political aspects of Russian culture. He is very excited to share this culture with others and educate people about the situation in Russia in a fun way.

Dalton Roberts is in the Russian and East European Studies program at the U of O. He became interested in this class because of the Russian immersion aspects of this course. He is very excited about The Dragon because of its ability to satirically poke fun at the social and political aspects of Russian culture. He is very excited to share this culture with others and educate people about the situation in Russia in a fun way.

Director
Julia Nemirovskaya

Assistant directors
Lara Ravich, Julia Frederick, Heghine Hakobyan

Assistants, technical support
Paul Forehand, Nicholas Ligett, David Etchepare, Rick Moore, Victoria Knudsen

Art, stage design
Raquel Mansell, Lizka Vaintrob, Gwendolyn (Gwyn) Snider, Kayla (Chas) Cassidy, Ramona Tougas, Marina Larson, Robert Dalton, Ben Llewellyn

Stage set
Jeremy Buley

Music directors
Nikolai Valov, Autumn (Toma) Sexton

Editing
Lara Ravitch

Costumes
Anastasia Savenko-Moore, Eryn McNamara, Lisa Shultz Tucker

Choreography
Aleksandr (Xander) Berenstein

Props
Drew Sampson

Public relations, program and poster
Bridget Gavin, Lindsay Stamsos, Tatevik Mazmanyan, Claire Aubin, Paul Forehand, Melissa Axtell, Heghine Hakobyan

Language tutoring
Tatiana Yarygina, Eric Spreat, Lara Ravitch, Xander Berenstein, Heghine Hakobyan

Makeup
Claire Aubin, Victoria Knudsen

Lights
Julia Frederick, David Etchepare

Special effects
Nicholas Ligett

Jennifer Presto, UO REEES Director
Judith Baskin, CAS Associate Dean of Humanities
Ronald Rencler, UO Libraries Communication Director
Amanda Garcia, UO Libraries Exhibit & Imaging Specialist
Kevin Hatfield, UO Housing Assistant Director of Residence Life
David Mason, UO School of Music and Dance Facilities Services Director
Yen Tran, Global Scholars Hall Undergraduate Services Librarian
Stacie Irvin, UO Housing Conference Services Manager
Robert Davis, Global Scholars Hall Resident Scholar
The play begins with a press conference, where we learn about the Dragon's human rights violations, authoritarian regime, and his readiness to flaunt his nuclear power. The most important of these issues as regards the play is that each year the dragon takes a young girl who is never seen again.

We are introduced to Lancelot, descended from the King Arthur’s knight of the same name, who like his ancestor, still clings to medieval romantic, chivalric notions. He has been wandering in search of adventure and now finds himself at a house where he meets Mashenka. Mashenka, though a girl’s name (diminutive form of Maria), is actually a wise-cracking, self-important tomcat. The cat apprises Lancelot of the Dragon, and of her master and maiden-in-distress: Elsa. While Mashenka is explaining, Elsa and her father Charlemagne return from an outing. Lancelot cannot believe how complacent both Elsa and Charlemagne are in light of the fact that Elsa is soon to be given to the Dragon. Elsa believes that she will be able to tame the beast, while Charlemagne reasons that if they were to revolt against this dragon, then another (possibly worse) one would take its place. “The best way to ensure against dragons is to have one of your own.”

The Dragon, who has the ability to masquerade as a human, comes to visit Elsa. Upon entering he meets Lancelot and (naturally) they disagree ideologically. Lancelot challenges the Dragon. Initially the Dragon attempts to bribe Lancelot with shares in a lucrative oil company, and when Lancelot refuses the Dragon decides to kill him immediately. Before he can do this, however, Charlemagne (the city’s archivist) notifies the Dragon of a document which ensures the safety of the challenger until the day of battle.

Paul Forehand is a 2nd year graduate student studying Russian Literature, and GTF for the theater class. Ironically, he is a bookworm, playing a bookworm in this year’s theater production. This is his most daring (and only) role since he played Abraham Lincoln in the third grade.

Allie Sasek is a junior pursuing Russian studies. She signed up for Russian Through Theatre without any prior knowledge of the theatre arts. She appreciates the subtleties of the play and the characters both on and off stage. After she graduates, Allie hopes to become a wandering riddler with a penchant for adventures and gelato (preferably limoncello).

Bridget Gavin has been a part of theatre for as long as she can remember, but this is the first time she has done anything with Russian Theatre. She has been learning the Russian language for about three months. She acts as the Mayor in the play.
Ramona Tougas is a fourth year PhD student in Comparative Literature at U of O. She is happy to have the opportunity to sing, dance, and speak Russian as the “Nice” Dragon Head—even though his homophobia, xenophobia, bribery and general arrogance are not so nice. Ramona is thankful to the cast and crew, and to Nubes for love, patience, and help with learning lines.

Gwyn Snider is a Russian Language and Public Policy major, participating in Russian Theatre for her second year. She plays a guard and the Evil Dragon Head. She joined Russian theatre initially because of her love of wearing funny hats and is glad that this year she can continue the tradition.

Samuel Noble plays the brave knight Lancelot in The Dragon and enjoys being able to “spread his wings” and be as dramatic as he, and the show, will allow. He is a Theater Arts major.

Melissa Axtell is a Linguistics major with an avid love for both Russian and the theatre arts. She has been acting since she was nine and has been in over twenty plays including such favorites as Annie, The Wizard of Oz, and The Diary of Anne Frank. She has enjoyed the challenge of being ’catty’ onstage and bringing the cat to life! Melissa has loved the chance to be onstage and involved with this production!

Act II

The Mayor and her son and aide, Henrik, arrive to try to dissuade Lancelot from fighting the Dragon. When he refuses, Henrik promises to spare Elsa from the Dragon if she will kill Lancelot.

The Mayor and Henrik worriedly discuss the upcoming battle. Henrik worries that Lancelot may actually succeed in killing the Dragon, but the Mayor reassures him.

The day of the battle arrives. The weapons with which the townsfolk provide Lancelot are a bowl for a helmet, a tray for a shield, and an IOU for a spear. However, just before the battle, Mashenka reveals to Lancelot craftsmen who have come to give him actual weapons: a flying carpet, a hat that grants invisibility, and a sword.

The townspeople gather to watch the battle. They are forbidden from looking up to watch the battle and instead receive propaganda from Henrik. One by one, the Dragon's heads fall. Hearing that Lancelot has died while defeating the Dragon, the Mayor seizes power.

15 Minute Intermission

Act III

A year passes and the Mayor has declared herself President. The official history has been amended to declare that the President, not Lancelot, defeated the Dragon. Business in the city is much the same. Corruption abounds and the President has continued the Dragon’s tyranny.

The President, to commemorate her defeat of the Dragon, decides to hold a double wedding between Charlemagne and herself, and Henrik and Elsa. Charlemagne is recalcitrant: he is against the double marriage and refuses to believe the official story that the President killed the Dragon. However, the President and her son, Henrik, think that Charlemagne wants to get a better deal in return for marriage.

All is not well, though, as the President has become paranoid that Lancelot, still wearing his invisibility cap, lurks around every corner. She and Henrik plot and soon trick Elsa into confirming Lancelot’s supposed death. Overjoyed, the President and Henrik continue with the double marriage.

The wedding begins, but before the vows can be finalized, Lancelot returns. Fearing his wrath, the President and Henrik do nothing to prevent his taking power. Lancelot has the President arrested and appoints Henrik his aide and personal translator in lieu of Mashenka’s disappearance. After giving his final speech in which he outlines his new, progressive, and slightly draconian rule, Lancelot marries Elsa.
Claire Aubin is a second year Russian language student with majors in International Studies and Art History. Her passion for the arts as well as Eastern European culture made this class seem like a perfect way to spend winter term. She loves the way that arts have a tendency to reflect the social, political, and economic situation of their age, and she believes this play is a perfect example of that. She hopes everyone loves watching this play as much as she has loved working with the cast and crew to make it real! Долой дракона!

Raquel Mansell is an architecture student who wanted to know more about her Russian heritage! She loves painting, drawing, and playing music. She is playing as the second reporter and as a city council member.

Rachel Bell is currently a junior at the U of O. She is a Russian major. This class had been really interesting to her because it was a way to put her knowledge into practice outside of the classroom. She plays one of the pussy riot girls, a cat, and the blacksmith.

Xander Berenstein is a native Russian speaker and pre-professional ballet dancer—currently in a traineeship with the Eugene Ballet Company. This is his first time performing in the Russian Through Theater class and he is very excited about being able to choreograph and dance in the play. He also plays a servant as a spy.

Tatevik Mazmuyan is a second-year Biology major in Pre-Medicine and a first-year Resident Assistant in Carson Hall. She was born and grew up in Russia and takes the Russian language class. She has always had an interest in theatre and thought this would be a fun class to take. She plays a pussy riot girl, a cat, one of the friends of Elsa, and a servant as a spy.

Lindsay Stamsos is a third year Russian student and first became interested in the CIS and Russian language after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and subsequent move to Kiev, Ukraine. Her favorite proverb always cracks her up: "Смех без причины - признак дурачины = A smile without a reason is a sign of idiocy."

Chas Cassidy is a Russian literature major whose diverse interests include yoga, astrology, and prison abolition. She plays the Dragon’s final sacrifice, the ambitious gymnast Elsa. Her favorite word in Russian is the nuanced "народ," which refers to both a nation and its people.

Heghine Hakobyan has been with the University of Oregon Russian Theater since 2008. In this year’s play she climbs the corporate ladder from the city’s Mayor up to the President of the Dragon-land.