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Contact: **luca pr** / Darren DeLuca / darren@luca-pr.com / 603-489-7624



THE GAAGA
a site specific phantasmagoria

Written & Director by Sasha Denisova
Co-Directed by Igor Golyak

June 2-18, 2023 / US Premiere

BEAT BREW HALL
13 Brattle St., Harvard Square
Live, In-Person June 2-18

STREAMING WORLDWIDE
Live, Online June 8-18

Needham, MA – May 4, 2023 – Arlekin Players Theatre & (zero-G) Virtual Theater Lab, an award-winning, artist-driven theater company helmed by Ukrainian-born artistic director Igor Golyak, today announces the US Premiere of ***THE GAAGA***, a new site specific phantasmagoria written and directed by celebrated Ukrainian playwright and director Sasha Denisova. ***THE GAAGA*** will be presented at the abandoned Beat Brew Hall restaurant in Harvard Square, converted into a bomb shelter. The production is co-directed by Igor Golyak who is designing the virtual elements which will stream worldwide. The in person performances run June 2-18; the virtual June 8-18.

Developed through first-person interviews with refugees and officials, and inspired by world events, ***THE GAAGA*** is a darkly funny, haunting and fantastical trip through the consequences of war. Set in a bomb shelter, a Ukrainian girl dreams Vladimir Putin and his cronies into a courtroom and tries them for crimes of war. The playwright and director, Sasha Denisova, a widely celebrated theater maker from Ukraine, fled Moscow in the first days of war and has been living as a refugee in Poland, where she interviewed refugees, officials and studies publicly available materials to create ***THE GAAGA***. She directed the world premiere in February, 2023 at Theatre Polski, the oldest theater in Poland. ***“In the first days of the war, I fled from Moscow, where the police came for me. Russia bombed Kyiv and my mother, Olga Denisova, who was born under the bombing of Kyiv on July 7, 1941. She refuses to leave and awaits victory in her home. During these months, I thought about***

what would give hope to me and those who fled the war. A trial of Putin and his government was the biggest expectation. A new “The Hague” – The Gaaga.”, says Denisova.

In the months after the war broke out, Igor Golyak and Sara Stackhouse of Arlekin spoke with the displaced Denisova several times on Zoom while they were working on *The Orchard* in New York. Golyak, who was born in Kyiv, explains, ***“I have long been influenced by Sasha’s brilliant productions, her explosion of ideas, their scope and spectacle, and the way her plays turn tragedy into comedy, exposing our humanity. When we talked about her idea for The Gaaga, we immediately commissioned her to write it and invited her to come to Boston to create it with the Arlekin company.”*** Arlekin’s production marks the US premiere for **THE GAAGA**, and the team made the decision not to set it in a theater, but instead in a converted restaurant - Harvard Square’s Beat Brew Hall - which closed during the pandemic.

Transforming the venue into a makeshift bomb shelter has been the work of environmental designer Irina Kruzhilina, collaborating closely with Denisova and an international design team that includes composers Jacek Jędrasik & Shimon Zyms (Poland), streaming video designer Eric Dunlap (Berlin), Boston-based lighting designer Kevin Fulton, costume designer David R. Gammons, sound designer Brendan Patrick Doyle, with Arlekin company members Irina Vilenchik designing props and Anna Furman overseeing hair and makeup. The project is co-directed by Igor Golyak who is designing and technically directing the virtual production. The producer is Sara Stackhouse.

THE GAAGA is experienced through the eyes of a Ukrainian teen who has lost her entire family in the war, situated in a bomb shelter. Taisiia Fedorenko is a 17 year old Ukrainian refugee who has been in the US, without her family, since the beginning of the war; she is playing the role of The Girl. She is joined by 17 other cast members, including Boston favorites Anne Gottlieb, Dev Luthra, Robert Pemberton and Robert Walsh, Arlekin company members Boris Berdnikov, Irina Bordian, Jenya Brodskaya, Darya Denisova, Polina Dubovikova, Julia Shikh, Misha Tyutyunik and Irina Vilenchik, Ukrainian actor Ilia Volok, with Jeremy Beazlie, Daniel Boudreau, Michael Lopez, and Garrett Sands.

The project is part of Arlekin’s #Artists4Ukraine Initiative, which has included multimedia site-specific staged readings of **JUST TELL NO ONE**, directed by Golyak, presented at Lincoln Center in March and hosted at Huntington Theatre Boston in April. Launched within days of the start of the war in Ukraine, #Artists4Ukraine has raised significant funds for Ukrainian humanitarian organizations and for the Center for International Theatre Development’s Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings project. In summer 2022, Igor Golyak traveled with actress Jessica Hecht, her Campfire Project, and IsraAID to lead artistic workshops with refugee women and children living in Moldova. Arlekin Players is a theater of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, committed to lifting up the talented playwrights and theater-makers of Ukraine and amplifying their voices during this time of war.

Details At-A-Glance

Arlekin Players Theatre and (zero-G) Virtual Theater Lab present

A site-specific phantasmagoria | US Premiere

Written and Directed by **Sasha Denisova**

Co-Directed by **Igor Golyak**

Produced by **Sara Stackhouse**

Environmental Design by **Irina Kruzhilina**

Lighting Design by **Kevin Fulton**

Costume Design by **David R. Gammons**

Music Composed by **Jacek Jędrasik & Shimon Zyms**

Sound Design by **Brendan Patrick Doyle**

Streaming Video Design by **Eric Dunlap**

Virtual Design & Technical Direction by **Igor Golyak**

Properties by **Irina Vilenchik** with **Julia Shikh**
Hair & Makeup by **Anna Furman**
Translation by **Polina Dubovikova** and **Theresa Lang**
Production Stage Manager, **Kyra Bowie**
Assistant Stage Manager, **Natasha Kushnarova**
Production Manager, **Sara Stackhouse**
Technical Director, **Justin Lahue**
Scenic Associate, **Thijs Beuming**
Wardrobe Supervisor, **Alla Trachtenberg**
Wardrobe Assistant, **Natasha Mitlina**
Cameras Operator, **Denis Denisov**
Maestro Interactive Platform Design, **ArtCat**
Networking Support, **Seth Graham**
Production Assistant, **Emma Resek**
General Manager, **Mark W. Soucy**
House Manager, **Marianna Golyak**

In Person | BEAT BREW HALL, 13 Brattle St, Harvard Square **JUNE 2-18**
Virtually Online | Streaming Worldwide **JUNE 8-18**

June 2 - Preview, 8:00pm In Person Only
June 3 - Preview, 8:00pm In Person Only
June 4 - Preview, 2:00pm In Person Only
June 5 - Press Opening, 7:30pm In Person Only

June 8 - Performance 7:30pm In Person & Virtual
June 9 - Performance 8:00pm In Person & Virtual
June 10 - Performances 3:00pm & 8:00pm In Person & Virtual
June 11 - Performance 2:00pm In Person & Virtual

June 15 - Performance 7:30pm In Person & Virtual
June 16 - Performance 8:00 In Person & Virtual
June 17 - Performances 3:00pm & 8:00pm In Person & Virtual
June 18 - Performance 2:00pm In Person & Virtual

Tickets & Info: **www.arlekinplayers.com**

Arlekin Players Theatre was founded by Artistic Director Igor Golyak in 2009 and has since toured to New York, Chicago, and Hartford, as well as to international festivals in Russia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Monaco. Most recently Arlekin produced *The Orchard* featuring Jessica Hecht and Mikhail Baryshnikov, both Off-Broadway and in Boston. Arlekin received world-wide acclaim, including two New York Times Critic's Picks, for their groundbreaking virtual theater projects during the pandemic, including of *State vs Natasha Banina* and *chekhovOS* /an experimental game/ featuring Mikhail Baryshnikov as Anton Chekhov. Arlekin has received multiple awards for its work including four 2020 Elliot Norton Awards from the Boston Theater Critics Association for recent productions of *The Stone* and *The Seagull*. Arlekin takes strong pride in their emphasis on self-identity; they are a company of immigrants performing works that play on the ideas of cross-culture, home, and traditions, challenging the idea of nationality, and finding common themes that unite us all. In 2020, Arlekin launched its

Zero Gravity (zero-G) Virtual Theater Lab to explore new theater possibilities for a new time. The company makes its home in Needham, MA. For more information, visit www.arlekinplayers.com.

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