



PO Box 15392
WDC 20003
(202) 415-4838
press@taffetypunk.com
www.taffetypunk.com

12 November 2019

Contact: Marcus Kyd
press@taffetypunk.com
(202) 415-4838

For Immediate Release:

♥♥♥♥ **Russians Invade DC with Love, via Canada** ♥♥♥♥♥

Taffety Punk presents a play based on the love letters of Anton Chekhov & Olga Knipper

I Take Your Hand in Mine...

by **Carol Rocamora**

directed by **Dmitry Zhukovsky**

Where: Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003)

When: Dec 9 - 13, 2019, all shows at 8pm

Price: \$15. Tickets available at www.taffetypunk.com.

Theirs was one of the theatre world's most extraordinary love stories: he was a famous playwright and she was a leading actor of the Moscow Art Theatre. *I Take Your Hand in Mine...* by Carol Rocamora is a play suggested by the love letters (over four hundred of them) of Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper. Richard Sheridan Willis and Rena Polley play the playwright and his leading lady in a relationship that spans the birth of the Moscow Art Theatre and the production of Chekhov's four major plays. Embedded into the everyday are gems of theatre history and insights into Chekhov's creative process, as well as a real-life love story that is as tempestuous, teasing, and spontaneous as any Chekhov play.

"We are so fortunate that the Chekhov-Knipper correspondence was preserved," says director Dmitry Zhukovsky. "While their careers kept them apart, these letters depict a relationship that was very much alive, and vibrant with tender feelings, humor, and artistic insights." Carol Rocamora's play "takes us into the heart of a special love affair and also opens for us a vital page in Russian theatre history."

Actor **Rena Polley** savors this pared-down production. "We really get to focus on their relationship. This means as actors, Richard and I only have each other and maybe the occasional prop. It is storytelling and acting at its most elemental. There is nowhere to hide."

Actor **Richard Sheridan Willis** is a familiar face on Washington D.C. stages, having performed in productions at the Folger Theatre, and The Shakespeare Theatre Company, and with Taffety Punk in his one-actor show *Strolling Player* in 2014. Asked about the challenges of portraying Anton Chekhov he says, "For me, his quiet intelligence is the biggest challenge. He was an astute observer; a quiet man with a surreal wit and the detachment of a doctor. I feel I have neither of those qualities."

This production played to sold out houses over two runs in Toronto. Now presented to the audiences of Washington D.C. by Taffety Punk Theatre Company, *I Take Your Hand in Mine...* is a collaboration with Toronto's **The Chekhov Collective**, a company founded by Rena Polley to explore Chekhov's work and the acting technique of his nephew Michael Chekhov, and **Theatrus**, a performance art company created by recent Russian émigrées Dmitry Zhukovsky and Yulia Rubina.

During the previous run in Toronto reviewer Istvan Dugalin noted, "It is presented in a mode inspired by Chekhov," demonstrating playwright Rocamora's "dedication to the iconic playwright's vision. **A must-see for Chekhov enthusiasts!**"

I Take Your Hand in Mine... is presented in a limited engagement at the **Capitol Hill Arts Workshop** (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003 – two blocks from Metro's Orange/Blue Line stop at Eastern Market) from Monday, Dec 9 through Friday, Dec 13. All shows are at 8:00pm. Starring Rena Polley as Olga Knipper and Richard Sheridan Willis as Anton Chekhov. *I Take Your Hand in Mine...* is directed by Dmitry Zhukovsky.

This show is estimated to occupy 90 minutes of show time. Give or take.

For hi-res photos, go to: www.taffetypunk.com/press

Taffety Punk Theatre Company is the resident company at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. The company won the very first John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company at the Helen Hayes Awards. More recently, the company received two Helen Hayes nominations for original choreography in both *Phaeton* and *An Iliad*. Taffety Punk's mission is to maintain a dynamic ensemble of actors, dancers and musicians who ignite a public passion for theatre by making the classical and the contemporary exciting, meaningful, and affordable.

Carol Rocamora (playwright) Carol Rocamora is a translator, director, teacher and playwright and received her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in Russian literature. Dr. Rocamora has translated Chekhov's complete dramatic works as well as writing her play *I Take Your Hand in Mine...*. She currently teaches theatre in the Department of Dramatic Writing at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Dr. Rocamora has been the recipient of the David Payne Carter Award for Teaching Excellence. She also lectures on Chekhov and theatre history at the Juilliard School. Formerly, she was the founder and artistic director of the Philadelphia Festival Theatre for New Plays at the Annenberg Center. Her other publications include two biographies: *Acts of Courage: Vaclav Havel's Life in the Theatre* (2005); *Anton Chekhov: A Life In Four Acts* (2013); and a new collection of Russian adaptations entitled, *Troika* (2016). She has written about theatre for *The Nation*, *The New York Times* and *The London Guardian*, and currently contributes to *American Theatre Magazine* and other on-line publications. She is a member of the Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, and American Theatre Critics Association.

Rena Polley (Olga Knipper) is an actor, writer, producer and teacher and has worked in theatre, television and film for over twenty years. For The Chekhov Collective she recently played Ranevskaya in *The Cherry Orchard*, Arkadina in *The Seagull* and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She was co-artistic director of Stiletto Theatre Company and has also written, produced and performed in three short films that toured various festivals around the world. She has been nominated for a "Best Actress Award" at the Yorkton Film Festival as well as three Dora's for Stiletto Company's production of *Derailed*, which was published by Playwrights Canada. Rena has been involved for fifteen years with the Michael Chekhov Association and is a founding member of Michael Chekhov Canada.

Richard Sheridan Willis (Anton Chekhov) Richard trained at RADA and has worked extensively at theatres throughout the world. Companies include Folger Shakespeare Theatre in Washington DC; Norway's National Theatre; Peter Hall Company, London; Denver Centre Theatre Co; The Wilma Theatre, Philadelphia. Last year he played Gaev in *The Cherry Orchard* for The Chekhov Collective at Canadian Stage. Recent theatre includes *Breathing Corpses* (Coal Mine) Title role in *Julius Caesar* (St Lawrence Shakespeare Festival) *Twelfth Night*, *Henry V* (Folger Theatre), *The Clockmaker*, *Vigil* (STC), Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* (STONC), *Father in The Railway Children* (Roundhouse Theatre, Toronto), *Vigil* (STC), *Catch 22* (Lucille Lortelle, NYC). In 2013 he performed his one-man play *Strolling Player* at the Tarragon Extraspace in the Toronto Fringe Festival, which has also played in the UK and with Taffety Punk in Washington DC. He is currently working on his next play *Boy Beatle*. TV: *Dr. Who*, *Law & Order*, *Flashpoint*, *Nikita*, *Lost Girl*. Film: *The Big Bad Swim*, *Absolution*, *Ghost in the Noonday Sun*. <https://about.me/RichardSheridanWillis>

Dmitry Zhukovsky (Director) is a theatre director, producer and acting coach. His theatre career includes about 15 years as an actor and more than 25 years of teaching acting and directing in the leading theatre, TV and film schools in the USSR, Moldova and Russia. Moving to Canada, Dmitry has created Theatrus company and participated in several theatre, educational and art projects among them *The Musician*, *An Étude* (2014), *Vivisection* (Toronto, Nuit Blanche 2015), Freedom of Expression (acting training workshop), *The Tongue Play* (Toronto, Ryerson University, 2017) *Russian Souls* (Washington and Lee University, USA 2018). *I Take Your Hand in Mine...* is Dmitry's second collaboration as a director with The Chekhov Collective after the production of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in 2016.

Yulia Rubina (Theatrus) is a communications specialist and theatre producer. She is a co-founder of Theatrus, theatre group based in Toronto. Having arrived in Canada, she has participated in co-production and community outreach for the production *The Musician*, *An Étude* (2014), *Vivisection* (Nuit Blanche 2015) and was co-producer for Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (2016).

#