

Oksana Volkova plays Maddalena

Honoured Artiste of Belarus admits that singing in Verdi's *Rigoletto* at Belarus' National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre is more challenging than at New York's famous Metropolitan Opera House

Ms. Volkova tells us, "It's always more difficult to sing in your home country, since you know those present: people who have followed your career since student days, and who take great interest. Really, I dislike comparing theatres."

In *Rigoletto*, Oksana Volkova plays Maddalena, who she admits seems a huge role to most people. However, she asserts, "Actually, it's a very small role, but impressive, being complex. It's not difficult vocally and some fragments allow you to show off your soloist abilities. Maddalena is key to the story, but her involvement on stage is small. The story of Rigoletto, his daughter and the duke is more important."

The premiere of the new *Rigoletto* at the Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus follows five previous stagings at the country's main operatic venue. The latest involves an international team, conducted by the Bolshoi Theatre's Viktor Ploskina. Anna Kontek, who

has been working in Finland for many years, has designed the sets, and Estonian Neeme Kuningas is directing. Responsible for over a hundred stagings of operas, operettas and musicals, as well as writing librettos and translations for such shows, Mr. Kuningas has worked with theatres across Russia, China and Europe, with performances in Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Finland and Turkey. His new

Rigoletto is his third staging of Verdi's masterpiece.

Verdi was inspired by Victor Hugo's *The King Amuses Himself* in composing *Rigoletto* but its undermining of the authority of the royal family brought censorship. Verdi sent the score to his friend Francesco Piave, almost twenty years after its Paris premiere, asking for him to write a new libretto. Verdi had already planned the story,



During *Rigoletto* performance

basic staging and characters. Now, at the request of censors, he took the action from France to Italy: King Francis I was transformed into the Duke of Mantua, and the real jester Triboulet was renamed Rigoletto. Every character was carefully drawn, giving the opera such realism that it has remained a sensation ever since.

The new Minsk staging includes a rotating podium and acoustic scenery with mirrored walls. As Mr. Kuningas' third staging of *Rigoletto*, it is quite different

to his versions performed in Estonia and Sweden, which received great acclaim. However, his use of a rotating circle on stage is well-known.

Set designer Anna Kontek has long been co-operating with Mr. Kuningas but is staging *Rigoletto* for the first time. She notes that her set is quickly changeable, with the rotating circle allowing for continuous redressing of the stage.

Naturally, acoustics are very important for opera: hence the use of mirrored walls, doors and a special

wall. An acoustic funnel is being created, to help sounds carry. She hopes that the show may be taken on tour abroad by the Bolshoi Theatre, since the set is so portable.

Conductor Viktor Ploskina is convinced that audiences will adore the new performance, just as the actors are enjoying taking part. "We have the opportunity to touch Verdi's greatest creation. *Rigoletto* is a diamond: the more you watch it, the more interesting and musical it becomes," the maestro smiles.

Wolf's Sun tells of young intelligence officer

By Vladimir Samsonov

Shooting completed on 12-part adventure drama co-produced by Belarusfilm National Film Studio and Star Media Distribution Russian Film Company

Wolf's Sun is set in 1924, on the territory of Poland and Soviet Belarus, narrating the work of a young Soviet intelligence officer.

On the precipice of invasion from Poland, our hero must do the impossible in trying to prevent this, acting under the commander of the operation.

Belarusian actors Alexander Sutskov, Anatoly Golub, Oleg Tkachev, Ivan Matskevich, Sergey Vlasov, Sergey Kovalsky from Belarus, Vladimir Ilin, Andrey Merzlikin, Yekaterina Klimova,



Shot from the film *Wolf's Sun*

Alexander Robak, Pavel Trubiner and Olga Krasko are joined by Gela Meskhi from Russia, and Ewa Szykulska, Jan Frycz, Mag-

dalena Rózanska and Krzysztof Bochenek from Poland. The film is to premiere at the end of this year or early 2015.

Love expressed through colour

By Vladimir Samsonov

Brest's Regional Social and Cultural Centre hosts *To Women With Love* exhibition, by Brest artists

The nature of femininity is explored through the many portraits on show, with beautiful floral displays of lilac sprays and tulips, peonies and narcissi created a fitting, fragrant atmosphere. Their spring colours are the perfect complement to the exhibition's mood.

Mikhail Konkov, who heads the centre, tells us, "Annually, on the threshold of spring, we hold an exhibition entitled *Love Confessions* but, this year, we decided to change the concept, devoting it to women." There are 94 works, by 34 artists, on show — from Brest, Zhabinka and Kobrin: graphic works, paintings, sculpture, and arts and crafts pieces



At the exhibition

by members of the Belarusian Union of Artists. Works by venerable masters stand alongside those of young painters so far unknown.