

“Insulted. Belarus(sia)” Worldwide Reading Project.  
By John Freedman

The backstory of Andrei Kureichik's “Insulted. Belarus(sia)” is quite extraordinary. It is the rare case of a genuine work of dramatic art being created in real time about a topic that is self-destructing and transforming furiously even as each word is being tapped out on a computer keyboard.

When Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko (“the last dictator in Europe”) chose on August 9, 2020, to falsify an election he had lost in a landslide, he thought he was just bending a nation to suit his own needs as he had done for 26 years. In fact, he set off a revolution, as the Belarusian people poured onto the streets to support Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the woman they actually had elected. He also angered, and inspired, Kureichik, Belarus's top playwright and screenwriter, famed for his good-natured comedies. While posting a prodigious amount of exhortative information about the protests online, Kureichik began putting together a play that is based, in part, on statements made by Lukashenko (OLDSTER) and Tikhanovskaya (NOVICE), even as he interweaves them with five imagined characters who speak the language and thoughts that were coming to Kureichik fast and heavy.

These five other characters present an overview of Belarusian society – 1) MENTOR, an aging teacher who believes in “law and order” and helps guarantee Lukashenko's reelections every four years by falsifying results; 2) CORPSE, a young soccer fan with too much energy to burn who is sick of living under the same president his entire life; 3) AVIAN, a storm trooper who trained during the Maidan revolution in Ukraine and is now in Belarus to put down rebellions there; 4) CHEERFUL, a high-spirited, loving young woman who believes in asking the Universe to send her good vibes, and whose sister is to marry the storm trooper; and 5) YOUTH, Lukashenko's teenaged son Kolya, who is being groomed for the presidency, but would prefer to play internet games.

The lives of every one of these people – with the possible exception of Kolya, for his debt to destiny is yet to be paid - will be impacted tragically by Lukashenko's decision to crush the revolution with violence and torture. And yet, the resulting play – hard-hitting as it is – is filled with humor, hope and dignity.

Kureichik completed “Insulted. Belarus(sia)” on September 9. He sent it to me at 3:13 p.m. Central European Time, asking if I would translate it and

organize a few readings in order to spread the word about the events in Belarus. Within ten minutes I had lined up six theaters, including New York Theatre Workshop, even without a script they could read. Three days later I finished the translation and got it out to dozens more theaters. As of September 16, 28 companies in six countries are participating in the “Insulted. Belarus(sia)” Worldwide Reading Project. More will join soon.