

LOCO

by Natacha Belova et Tita Iacobelli



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Cast and Credits

Direction and Dramaturgy **Tita Iacobelli** and **Natacha Belova**

Set Design and Puppets **Natacha Belova**

Performance **Tita Iacobelli** in alternance with **Anne Romain** and **Marta Pereira** in alternance with **Marina Simonova**

Choreography and External View **Nicole Mossoux**

Dramaturgy Assistant and External View **Raven Rüell**

Thanks for Artistic Contribution **Sophie Warnant**

Lighting Design **Christian Halkin**

Puppets **Loïc Nebreda**

Sound Design **Simón González**

Costumes **Jackye Fauconnier**

Set Design and Assistant Direction **Camille Burckel**

Artistic Production **Daniel Córdova**

Production **Compagnie Tchaïka**

Created at Studio Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles

Co-production **Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, Théâtre de Poche Bruxelles, L'Atelier Théâtre Jean Vilar Louvain-la-Neuve, Maison de la Culture de Tournai, Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes Charleville-Mézières, Fondation Corpartes Santiago Chile, Théâtre de la Cité Toulouse - with the support of Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles**

Premiered in September 2021 at the World Festival of Puppet Theatres in Charleville-Mézières

Duration: 60 minutes

Audience: Age 12 and up

SYNOPSIS

1834, Saint Petersburg. Nikolai Gogol – now considered a classic Russian literature author – was only 25 years old when he wrote *Diary of a Madman*.

Presented in the form of a personal diary, a minor civil servant of the Russian Empire, Poprishchin, details his daily life, a simple routine punctuated by modest solitary pleasures. Over the pages, confessions unfold about his feelings for Sophie, the daughter of his director. A mirrored love that reflects his miserable condition and from which emerges the irresistible need to invent "another self," a double worthy of the elusive beauty. From this identity quest arise the first signs of madness, and in just a few days, he believes himself to be Ferdinand VIII, the new king of Spain. Immersed in his own madness, impermeable to the tangible reality of the outside world, Poprishchin is eventually taken to an asylum by those he believes to be his subjects.

A civil servant of the St. Petersburg administration, Gogol seems to use his character as a puppet to experiment with other roles, other destinies, offering a perfect ground to unfold on stage the countless possibilities offered by puppetry and theater.

An absurd tale, *Diary of a Madman*, recalls the eternal quest for appearances that remains timeless. The frantic need to exist, to play a role in society, even if it means fantasizing about our lives.



To translate this major work onto the stage, two actresses and a puppet serve as a kind of multiple-bodied avatar, opening up all possibilities. Natacha Belova renews her collaboration with Teresita Iacobelli, with whom she previously created *Chayka* (awarded *Best Solo Performance at the Maeterlinck Awards in 2019*).

GENESIS AND ARTISTIC INTENTION

Through the story of this small employee and the life of Gogol, the artists explore their own solitudes, desires, frustrations, and disturbances in the face of what is established and reasonable. The surreal and poetic adventures of Poprishchin provide direct and intimate access to the absurdity we regularly face in our lives: the vital need to acquire a valued place in society, all while recognizing the absurdity of its values; the identity conflict between "being" and "appearing," constantly stoked by the demands of our seduction- and performance-based society.

This is not a celebration of madness as pathology, but a need to "shuffle the cards," to step away from the usual discourse, to seek a new perspective on reality. Abandoning common logic to dream of something else. Paradoxically, it is in losing his reason that our hero has flashes of lucidity about the system he belongs to.

The directors' intention is clear: to mix the fiction of the story with the reality of its author who has lived a solitary life in voluntary exile far from Russia. Always concerned about the role he can play in Russian society, Gogol has made several attempts at professional careers all doomed to fail because of his hatred of the Russian bureaucratic system. Caught between extraordinary abilities and the fear that his writings were of demonic origin, evil, dangerous to him and to society, he will have tried his whole life to resolve this internal conflict. Regularly he burns his writings, considering them irrational and useless. At the end of his life, rejected by critics, his readers and his friends, his fate strangely coincides with that of his hero Popritchine.

Memory of a production of "Diary of a Madman" in the Soviet Union, 1990

By Natacha Belova

My father staged it in his small theater in Russia and he himself played the role of Popritchichin, the madman. This show was not a great success, but I especially remember the silence after Popritchichine's last monologue when he wants to rest on his mother's chest away from the taunts of men, his desk, the beatings with a stick that is inflicted on him in the asylum, away from his own delusions. My father, a little man sitting on the floor in the middle of a pasteboard setting, his big blue eyes fixed on the projector of his small theater, the light was too dim and the audience seemed to grow in this great silence.

I have many other more honorable memories of my father: director, actor, eloquent teacher, a great man. But why does my memory sends me back this miserable image?

I don't remember his titles. I remember him on stage as a madman. He, the lost child, abandoned before his birth by his father, separated at three years from his mother because of the war, starting the theater at the age of nine to give him all his life, until death. Alcoholic since the age of twenty, with a brilliant career shattered, genius and ridiculous, delirious in his theater, with his enormous glasses, almost blind, witness of another reality, of another world. He was too eccentric for our small town. A man too small to be an actor, a man too free for communism and too romantic for capitalism. So big and so small.

These memories provide grain to grind on what Gogol's story tells us about the multiple nature that each of us bears, on the vital desire to "appear", of forms of excess that are both underground and active, of the hiatus between "life played » and life lived, and above all of the enormity of an imaginary which unfolds in silent solitude. So big and so small.

The work of Nicolai Gogol, "Diary of a Madman" is an absurd tale that deals with the uncertain border between madness and reason. The hero, Popritchine, is a bottom-of-the-ladder civil servant who lives his day between the routine of his insignificant job and his little pleasures as a lonely man. The impossible love for Sophie, the daughter of his director, leads him to create his own reality to the point of mistaking himself for Ferdinand VIII King of Spain.

ARTISTIC NOTE

Immersed in a highly poetic universe, *LOCO* – much like the previous creation, *Chayka* – in its own way, translates a new scenic grammar. A singular language rooted in the fertile imagination of the two directors.

Centerpiece of this crossed gaze: the puppet. Those designed by Natacha Belova and Tita Iacobelli are on a human scale. A dimension that makes them close to the audience. Without breaking the theatrical convention, they hold out a mirror and invite us to observe them with acuity. The dexterity of handling, the care taken in merging the puppeteers and the animated object, seals our attention. And this is all the magic, the efficiency of the exercise: the puppet of the Belova/Iacobelli duo literally hugs the bodies of the performers. It is an extension of it. Hybrid, flexible, constantly reinvented before our eyes, this puppet comes to life thanks to the ingenuity of its performers.

From this alchemy are born all the possibilities. The viewers accept the multiple transformations that take place before their eyes. They lend themselves to the game, smile, let themselves be conquered by the emotion. Objects come to life, are diverted from their primary function to regain it a moment later.

If the ingredients, the breeding ground for this approach are identified, the result can only be achieved through hard work of the right measure. In this daring language, nothing can be left to chance at the risk of losing this apparent lightness: the light, the sound and musical work, the

rhythm, the text, the timbre of Tita Iacobelli's voice, so many brushstrokes essentials that give the final result its hold and credibility.





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THE TCHAÏKA COMPANY

The Tchaïka Company was founded by Tita Iacobelli, a Chilean actress and director, and Natacha Belova, a Belgian-Russian puppeteer. Their collaboration began in 2015 in Santiago, where they created an experimental theatrical laboratory focused on contemporary puppet theater. In 2018, they presented their first production, *Tchaïka*, which was followed a few years later by the show *LOCO* in 2021. The performance *Sisypholia*, co-created with Dorian Chavez, premiered in 2022. In 2025, the company is launching a new creation entitled *Une Traversée* at the Théâtre de la Cité in Toulouse.

The company has an international presence, having reached over 55,000 spectators in more than 20 countries. In addition to its productions, the Tchaïka non-profit organization (ASBL) also conducts training programs, organizing nearly 50 workshops and 10 laboratories in 15 countries, and has trained over 850 artists of 20 different nationalities.

Tchaïka is also involved in mobility programs for young artists, aiming to help them gain experience and integrate more easily into the professional world, while fostering international partnerships.



Charlotte Evrard - Administrator and Production
+32 479 77 43 68 // administration@tchaika.art

Natacha Belova - Artistic Director
direction@tchaika.art

Elise Reculeau - Technical Director
technique@tchaika.art



www.tchaika.art



@tchaika
@belovaiacobelli

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