



**Subject: DINNER WITH A SIDE ORDER OF DISSENT: Belarus Free Theatre announces the second *Kitchen Revolution*, an intimate evening of dinner and debate about the future of LGBTQI and abortion rights in the UK**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** Tuesday 20 June

On Tuesday 4 July, campaigning theatre company the Belarus Free Theatre will host the second evening in the ***Kitchen Revolution*** series at a secret King's Cross location.

Conversations will be provoked and inspired by representatives from **Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A.**, a direct action feminist performance group best known for 'knicker-bombing' former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny, and guided by Soviet-born British journalist, author and TV producer **Peter Pomerantsev**.

Responding to recent political events, this intimate evening of dinner and debate will focus on human rights in Northern Ireland, looking at the progress of **LGBTQI rights**, the campaign for **marriage equality**, the movement for **abortion rights** both north and south of the border, and the future of these rights in the UK in light of recent political developments.

Hosted by Belarus Free Theatre's Artistic Directors Natalia Kaliada and Nicolai Khalezin, it will feature food for the soul – made to our home-cooked family recipes – as well as food for the mind.

**Helena Walsh, of Speaking for I.M.E.L.D.A., said: "..."**

Belarus Free Theatre is one of the foremost refugee-led theatre companies in the UK and the only theatre in Europe banned by its government on political grounds. Their work has long addressed issues of gender identity and sexuality, most notably in the plays *Minsk 2011: A Reply to Kathy Acker*, *4.48 Psychosis*, *New York 1979* and *Merry Christmas, Ms Meadows*, which tackles transgender issues in the UK and worldwide via the texts of Oscar Wilde and the Ancient Greeks and is directed by Vladimir Shcherban.

From September 2017, their education arm, Studio Fortinbras, will begin a two-year campaign on LGBTQI rights in Belarus.

ENDS

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## NOTES FOR EDITORS

### Belarus Free Theatre presents *Kitchen Revolution*

**Theme:** What does the future hold for LGBTQI and abortion rights in Northern Ireland and the UK?

**Date:** Tuesday 4 July

**Time:** 19:00 – 22:00

**Location:** WC1. Guests will be given a meeting point, from where they will be escorted to the secret venue.

**Price:** £45 per head – includes a three-course dinner of fine Soviet cuisine, home cooked to our family recipes, and complimentary wine. A limited number of £25 tickets are also available for under 25s.

**Booking:** [belarusfreetheatre.ritdns.co.uk/kitchenrevolution](http://belarusfreetheatre.ritdns.co.uk/kitchenrevolution)

**Please let us know if you have any allergies or special access requirements.**

### About Kitchen Revolution

In the dark days of Soviet Russia, dissidents and intellectuals would meet in each other's homes to talk, argue and dream about one thing – freedom. Their whispered conversations, which would have been deemed treasonous if held in public, were nicknamed the "Kitchen Revolution".

The friction between public repression and private freedom frequently sparked moments of creative brilliance, and ultimately coalesced into the overthrow of the creaking Soviet system.

Decades later and a world away, many of us in the U.K are wondering how best to repair a society fragmented by divisions of wealth, race and religion, in an increasingly unstable political landscape.

The Belarus Free Theatre believe that it's to turn up the volume on the kitchen table whispers of the past: time for a new and more public Kitchen Revolution. This summer we're hosting a series of events that recreate the heady atmosphere – and home cooking – of the Soviet-era kitchen, and we invite you to join us.

**Natalia Kaliada said:** *"I spent my childhood under the Soviet regime, and I still remember my parents' kitchen reverberating with the fierce whispers of dissent. Even when everything is suppressed, it is very difficult to crush that human desire to keep talking, to keep challenging lies, defending truth, and hoping for change. With Kitchen Revolution, we want to remind people how precious and important the freedom to speak really is, and to look at how we might start translating words into real action."*

### **About Belarus Free Theatre**

Belarus Free Theatre is an award-winning theatre company founded in 2005 in Minsk under Europe's last surviving dictatorship. Its existence is illegal in a country where only state-sanctioned theatre is permitted. Since 2011, founding members, husband and wife team Natalia Kaliada and Nicolai Khalezin, together with Associate Director Vladimir Shcherban, have been political refugees in the UK; the company therefore now operates between Minsk and London.

In April, the company was forced to postpone the premiere of a new show in Minsk, after several of its members were arrested or injured during crackdowns on democratic protests against Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko.

BFT's permanent ensemble is based in Minsk, where they campaign, educate and perform every single day of the year, underground. Performers and audiences are under constant surveillance by the authorities. Performances have been raided by the KGB and audience members arrested. In spite of this, a BFT show is a hot ticket - typically 2,000 people apply for a 50-seat venue. Described by The New York Times as, *"one of the bravest and most inspired underground troupes on the planet"*, BFT has brought audiences some of the world's most provocative theatre, and has performed over 40 new productions in more than 30 countries over the past decade.

Belarus Free Theatre has enjoyed the support and solidarity of fellow artists including the late Harold Pinter and Vaclav Havel; Sir Tom Stoppard, David Lan, Steven Spielberg, Jude Law, Kevin Spacey, Mick Jagger, Jeremy Irons, Emma Thompson, Joanna Lumley, Vivienne Westwood, Kim Cattrall, Ian McKellen and Samuel West. Belarus Free Theatre is an Associate Company at the Young Vic and at the Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne, Australia. BFT also has long-standing partnerships with both the Public Theater and La MaMa in New York.

BFT's most recent theatre productions in the UK were *Burning Doors* – which played at the Soho Theatre in London and toured the UK from August to October 2016 – and *Tomorrow I Was Always a Lion* – a thrilling theatrical investigation into psychosis and recovery that

played at the Arcola and the Albany in October and November 2016.

In *Burning Doors*, BFT combined forces with Pussy Riot's Maria Alyokhina to share stories of persecuted artists, living under dictatorship, who refuse to be silenced. The production was awarded Best Ensemble at the 2016 Offie Awards.

In 2015, the BFT celebrated their tenth anniversary with a two-week festival of performances and discussions in London, entitled *Staging a Revolution*, featuring some of their most acclaimed original productions, reinvigorated classics and brand new work.

*Staging a Revolution* put ten taboo ideas – including mental health, torture, sex and inequality – centrestage in an effort to inspire and invigorate UK audiences to see themselves as change-makers. Following each performance, a curated panel of experts, including artists, campaigners, journalists and activists discussed an area related to each taboo topic in order to generate fresh ideas for taking action.

This approach (similar to the one that will be taken in *Kitchen Revolution*) is drawn directly from BFT's work in Minsk, where the space for free exchange of ideas and open debate is as valuable as the space in which to see independent theatre.