



[The Suicide](#) - at HOME, Manchester
by Manchester School Of Theatre
Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) October 2017

As part of their final year of three year's study, students at Manchester School Of Theatre have the privilege of performing in public performances of some rather wonderful, and usually lesser known masterpieces of theatre. At the moment they are using HOME Theatre whilst they await the completion of the renovation to their own 'home' The Capitol Theatre. The plays chosen for them are on the whole certainly not mainstream fayre, and although classics, are a little obscure, and this one was absolutely no exception.

The Suicide is a play by Russian dramatist **Nikolai Erdman**, and when it was written in 1928 it was immediately banned by the Soviet authorities as it quite clearly was anti-communist propaganda. It also saw Erdman transported to Siberia, and he had to wait 41 years before the first production (in Sweden), and until after his death before it was ever performed in Russia.

In brief, the story tells of a young man, unemployed by the system, and living a meagre existence relying on his wife's salary to feed both of them and his mother-in-law with whom they live. In a mock-heroic gesture he declares that he is going to commit suicide - something we understand that he has declared several times before, and so no-one really takes him too seriously. This time however, after finding out he cannot learn the tuba without first learning the piano - he really means it.

His next door neighbour arranges for several visitors to seek him out to write his suicide note condemning a certain part of Soviet life at that time, in the hope that the government might take notice if someone commits suicide for their particular cause.

Of course there are comedic consequences aplenty, as we are obviously not meant to take the action of the characters seriously, even if we are meant to take the themes to heart. It's a comedy, a farcical comedy, but perhaps not quite slick and overt to be classed as a farce as we know them today. And of course there is a happy ending.. or is there? Well there is a moral ending at least.

The play took a little while to get going this evening; a rather slow start and lacking pace. This though is not only due to it being the first night, but as with majority of farce / comedy writing,

the writer has to introduce the characters and the storyline first, and so the beginnings are usually little more than exposition. This beginning however, did seem to drag on longer than necessary. Once it got into its stride and more characters came on, the play became a lot more interesting and the audience noticeably relaxed and laughed a lot more.

It is a rather large cast play - requiring 14 actors - and this evening we even had a live pianist too (**Tammas Slater** playing his own compositions), as part of **Olivia Du Monceau's** practical design.

Ned Cooper played the protagonist Semyon with neurotic fervour and was instantly likeable from the start, with his worrying wife (**Kelly McGowan**) and God-fearing fussing mother-in-law (**Maryam Ali**) complementing him superbly - although why Ali needed an Eastern European accent when everyone else was either Manchester or RP I have no idea.

Playing opposite these three was the man next door, Alexander Petrovich, driven by his sexual appetite and monetary greed, his lustful and overt character being brought nicely to life by **Jordan Tweddle**, with his current mistress Margarita by his side, **Lucy Simpson**

A mention should also be given to the minor characters who come in hoping that Semyon will favour their cause in his suicide note. Each with their own separate characteristics and

characterisations and even though the politics of this play no longer matter - it's a history lesson now - they still showed us a glimpse of life in the Communist Soviet Union, and worked excellently as an ensemble. I particularly liked **Jake Ashton-Nelson's** Orthodox Priest, and **Cameron Waghorn** 's playing a small deaf and dumb boy, Egor.

'Life is hard; but life is easier when you can say that life is hard.'

Directed by course tutor **David Shirley** this was a very sensible and real production, tight and coherent. I do however have a couple of observations. First, the play is somewhat overlong. I do believe the play in this epoch would benefit from some judicious cutting. And secondly, I feel the pace of the play as a whole needs to be lifted and quickened. The softer and more reflective moments could have been lifted a little more and then the whole thing would have naturally sped up. This would also have had the benefit of forcing the actors to *ham things up* a little more, since perhaps more OTT characterisations would have been a little funnier.

Nevertheless, this was another massive success for the school and a very enjoyable evening for us the audience. Thank you and congratulations, and I look forward to your next production.