

U K S U S

OBERIOpera in 4 boxes

music: Erling Wold

libretto: Felix Strasser & Yulia Izmaylova & Erling Wold

from texts by: Daniil Charms, Aleksandr Vvedenskij, Konstantin Vaginov, Leonid Lipavskij

Our Mama – Babuska Baba Yaga, a woman who represents Stalin

Fefjulka Fensterchan - a woman who embodies Charm's two wives

The painter Michelangelo - tragic and dramatic; the serious side of life

Pushkin - more or less Daniil Charms

Karabister - a giant with infinitely long clock hands instead of arms

Ivan Ivanovitch Samovar - a samovar, that narrates, occasionally...

Ivan *before the Overture:*

In the days of the Russian Tsar, a man, Ivan Pavlovich Yuvachev, a member of a terrorist group that succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander the second, underwent a religious awakening in prison, or, possibly, experienced a mental breakdown, and, under the influence of this belief in his mystical abilities, and on his release from prison, predicted the exact date on which his child would be born. Calling his wife from a telephone owned by Leo Tolstoy, he demanded that she fulfill his prophecy. This she did, and on that day foretold, Daniil Kharms was born.

Overture

Ivan *over the Overture:*

By the time he came of age, the First World War and Russian revolution had swept away the world his father knew, and had replaced that world with one in which there was great hardship, a terrible time of hunger and fear, from enemies foreign and domestic, to wit, (1) Stalin's great political purges in which at least a thousand were shot each day and (2) the invasion by Germany which killed millions more. Joseph Stalin, the great General Secretary of the Soviet Union, born as Iosif Dzhugashvili, chose his nom de guerre in the revolution, and Kharms, born Daniil Yuvatchov, whose nom de plume is said to have discovered him by appearing in his thoughts and notebooks time and time again until no other name remained.

After Overture

Box 0: Winter '42

Ivan: in which Pushkin is attacked and robbed

Spoken by M1: (gong) *Russian winter* (gong). *The siege of Leningrad* (gong). *The poet Pushkin, dressed in a winter coat and fur hat, pulls a sled in the snow behind him. The sled is loaded with manuscripts. He stops and blows his nose.*

The poet Pushkin to the audience: *I was walking straight to work and met a man on the street who had purchased some Polish white bread. And that's it, more or less. Now bring that into the workshop! You'll get slaughtered. Crickets will sound in the seminar room. Someone will say, "I guess I'd like to know more about the Polish bread."*

Music

God what a terrible way to live STOP iron hands draw me into a pit STOP I've fallen so low and so far that I can never get up STOP I don't know what we will eat today STOP what we will eat in the future I don't know anymore STOP we hunger STOP (music) I would like only to lie still and sleep like Oblomov STOP (music) I'm going to the children's book publisher STOP to once again get no money END

O Lord who controls the mechanism of the universe, please have pity on these two poor organisms, give us warmth and asylum. And please convince the children's book publisher to deliver a few pennies to this pitiful soul.

M2 runs onto the stage, knocks Pushkin over, steals his fur cap, scatters the manuscripts and disappears.

The following is enacted by M1 & M2:

Pushkin lying down:

There once was a man named Semyonov.
Once Semyonov was walking and lost his handkerchief.
Semyonov looked for the handkerchief and lost his hat.
Semyonov looked for the hat and lost his jacket.
Semyonov looked for his jacket and lost his boots.

M1: "Ah,"

Pushkin: said Semyonov,

M1: "here you lose everything. I prefer to go home."

Pushkin: Semyonov headed home and got lost.

M1: "No,"

Pushkin: said Semyonov,

M1: "I would like to sit down and rest."

Pushkin: Semyonov sat on a rock and fell asleep.

M1 & M2 help Pushkin stand up, pat him off, clean him up.

M2: Anton Mikhailovich spat (M1 spits) then said

M1: "blech"

M2: spat again (M1 spits) again said,

M1: "blech"

M2: spat again (M1 spits) and said again,

M1: "blech"

Pushkin turns around, but can see no one. He continues. M1 & M2 place Fefjulka and Our Mama. The following is enacted by M1 & M2:

Pushkin gesture:

In the name of all that's holy, I wish to tell you of Himmelkumov. Himmelkumov stared at a girl and commanded her by his thoughts to turn her head toward him.

But it didn't work.

Then Himmelkumov commanded her by his thoughts to **not** turn her head to him. That did no good either.

Pushkin turns around, but can see no one. M1 & M2 move Fefjulka and Our Mama. Pushkin is alone, captured by the gaze of the audience.

Ivan:

We have here Kharms, a writer of children's books who hated children. Let us read from his novella *The Old Woman*: The offensive shouting of urchins can be heard from the street. I lie there, thinking up various means of execution for them. My favorite one is to infect them all with tetanus so that they suddenly stop moving. Their parents can drag them all home. They will lie in their beds unable even to eat, because their mouths won't open. They will be fed artificially. After a week the tetanus can pass off, but the children will be so feeble that they will have to lie in their beds for a whole month. Then they will gradually start to recover but I shall infect them with a second dose of tetanus and they will all croak.

M1 & M2 move Fefjulka and Our Mama. The following is enacted by M1 & M2:

Pushkin gesture:

In the name of all that's holy, I'd better tell you of Fedja Davidovich. Fedja Davidovich snuck up to the butter dish, and, when his wife bent down to cut her toenails, quickly grabbed the dish, opened it, scooped out the butter with his fingers and shoved it all in his mouth.

Pushkin turns around quickly and confronts the two women. Maybe they've been eating something. Fefjulka and Our Mama scramble:

Pushkin:

There they go by once again

There they turn to flee

The kisser number seven
The cunt number three!

The women run at Pushkin, hook him under his arms, drag him to the edge of the stage. M1 & M2 restrain him. A heroic pose: Our Mama and Fefjulka stand at attention, raise their hands in a pioneer salute and sing:

Our Mama and Fefjulka:

To the barricades we will run, we will run, we will
To the barricades we will run, and we'll get there first
In the name of freedom we will run, we will run, we will
In the name of freedom we will run, and we all will die
And for Stalin we will shout, we will shout, we shout
And for Stalin we will shout three times! Hurrah! Hurrah!

The women prepare the stage for a high-ranking visitor while they talk & sweep. The following is enacted by M1 & M2 & Pushkin:

Our Mama:

One day, Orlov ate too many mashed peas and died.

Fefjulka: And Krylov, after hearing this died too.

Our Mama: And Spiridonov simply died.

Fefjulka: And Spiridonov's wife fell off the cupboard and died as well.

Our Mama: And Spiridonov's children drowned in the pond.

Fefjulka: And Spiridonov's grandmother took to the bottle and wandered the highways.

Our Mama: And Mikhailov stopped combing his hair and got scabies.

Fefjulka: And Kruglov sketched a lady with a whip in her hand and went crazy.

Our Mama: And Perechrjostow was sent by telegraph four hundred rubles, and became so arrogant that he was fired from his job.

Fefjulka: They are all good people but they don't know how to keep it together.

Pushkin is captured by the gaze of the audience. Another examination. Maybe a magnifying glass is involved. Sherlock and Watson: M1 & M2. Everything freezes. Other characters come on and disappear as mentioned.

Ivan:

Here we have Pushkin, who is Kharms, who shares the occupation of poet with his name, and here Fejfulka, who is this character's wife, and also the token girl, when a token girl is needed in his boy's world. Our mama, who later changes, through the magic of theater, into Comrade Stalin. Finally Michelangelo, the painter and sculptor, who, if he had really created every work ascribed to him, would have had to live a hundred lifetimes or more. They present this story, which they have titled Uksus, a Russian word meaning vinegar, or as it is commonly known: acetic acid.

But before we begin, one word of warning: Kharms, like our composer, was a libertine, obsessed with sexual fantasies, writing of these in his notebooks in a cipher of his own devising, showing an obsession with convincing all the women in his life to give him a blowjob, dissatisfied by a culture that was too conservative. When those very few sexually explicit moments come forth here in this little play, please do not concern yourself nor clutch your pearls, as these moments will pass, to be replaced by gunshots and death and absurdity and joy, themselves replaced by explosions.

The arrival of a distinguished gentlemen announces itself noisily. Pushkin falls to the floor.

Fefjulka: Schujev!

Our Mama: Schujev!

Both: Schujeeeee!

Puskin (*writing on the backs of M1 & M2*):

"Drink vinegar, gentlemen," said Shuyev.

The painter Michelangelo appears raising a large bottle in his hand, walks up to the edge of the stage, and announces to the audience:

The painter Michelangelo: You must drink some vinegar, ladies and gentlemen!

Puskin *continues as Michaelangelo, M1 & M2 demonstrate the story:*

No one said anything.

Michelangelo: "Gentlemen!" shouted Shuyev. "I propose to you the drinking of vinegar!"

Pushkin: Makaronov rose from his armchair and said:

M1: "I welcome Shuyev's idea. Let's drink vinegar."

Puskin: Rastopyakin said:

M2 "I shall not be drinking vinegar."

Puskin: At this point a silence set in and everyone began to look at Shuyev. Shuyev sat stony-faced. It was not clear what he was thinking.

(pause)

Three minutes went by.

(pause)

Suchkov smothered a cough. Ryvin scratched his mouth. Kaltayev adjusted his tie.

M1: Makaronov wiggled his ears and his nose.

M2: And Rastopyakin, slumped against the back of his armchair, looked indifferently into the fireplace.

(pause)

Pushkin: Seven or eight more minutes went by.

(pause)

Ryvin stood up and went out of the room on tiptoe.

Kaltayev followed him with his eyes.

When the door had closed behind Ryvin, Shuyev said:

Michelangelo: "So. The mutineer has departed. To the devil with the mutineer!"

Pushkin: Everyone looked at each other in surprise,

M2: and Rastopyakin raised his head and fixed his gaze on Shuyev.

Michelangelo: Shuyev said sternly: "He who mutinees is a scoundrel!"

Pushkin: Suchkov cautiously, under the table, shrugged his shoulders. "I am in favour of the drinking of vinegar."

M1: Makaronov said quietly and looked expectantly at Shuyev.

M2: Rastopyakin hiccupped and, with embarrassment, and blushed like a maiden.

Pushkin: "Death to the mutiny," shouted Suchkov, baring his blackened teeth.

Assisted by M1 & M2, the women hand out shot glasses with vinegar to the audience.

Fefjulka: I welcome Schujev's idea. Let us all drink vinegar together.

Our Mama: Ladies and gentlemen! I highly recommend that we drink vinegar together!

Fefjulka: I am sure that we will drink vinegar.

Pushkin: But I don't want to drink vinegar.

Michelangelo threatening Pushkin: Whoever mutinies is a scoundrel. Death to the mutineers!

Women: Death to the mutineers!

Michelangelo pushes Pushkin to a coffee house set up by M1 & M2. Perhaps a painting by Kazimir Malevich is held up behind the small table: "Cow and Violin," "The Aviator," or "An Englishman in Moscow."

Michelangelo: Well?

Pushkin: Give me, if you have some, bœuf bub.

Michelangelo: You would like?

Pushkin: If you have it bœuf bub.

Michelangelo: What did you say?

Pushkin: I said I want bœuf bub.

Michelangelo: Your order?

Pushkin: Give me bœuf...

Musical Interlude

Box 1: Nadeždinskaja, 11

Ivan: in which Fefjulka and Pushkin dream of happiness together

M1: A humble dwelling in Leningrad: the walls covered with yellowed newsprint and pencil smears. Two doors: to the right 1 to 1.5 meters tall, to the left 3 meters tall. Black curtains covered with Soviet patterns. A wardrobe. A clothesline. A shabby table. Fefjulka sits and sews. Pushkin watches.

Fefjulka is sewing on a large piece of fabric.

Our Mama from next door, on the phone:

Mama, you pissed in the bed again! You shouldn't always piss in the bed!

Pushkin: You are sewing. What silliness is that. I do love your pussy hole, it smells quite hearty and is wet.

Pushkin goes under the fabric to smell Fefjulka's pussy hole.

Fefjulka: That is abhorrent! revolting! distasteful! That is abhorrent! disgusting! distasteful!

Pushkin *from under the fabric:* To my taste are your juices delightful! I am prepared! Your pussy to lick, to promptly slurp, and your slime to swallow, until it ends with a burp!

Our Mama *from next door, on the phone:*

Mamma, not again!

I told you to call me if you need to go pee pee! You just don't listen to me! (Crying)

E-e, I will do what you tell me.

The fabric has turned into a bedspread. F & P are in bed for the following. M1 & M2 are holding pillows for their heads:

Fefjulka: A little old woman had only four teeth in all her mouth. Three above and one below. With these teeth the little old woman could not chew. In fact, they were of no use to her at all.

And so the old woman decided to pull out all her teeth and to insert a corkscrew into the lower gums and a small pliers above. The old woman drank ink, ate beets and cleaned her ears with matches.

Pushkin: A little old lady had four rabbits. Three above and one below. The old woman caught these hares with her bare hands and put them in small cages. The rabbits cried and scratched their ears with their hind paws. The rabbits drank ink and ate beets.

Fefjulka: Ha-ha-ha! The rabbits drank ink and ate beets!

Pushkin to Fefjulka: Shh!

M1: **There is a loud hammering at the door.**

M2 hammers to music. Pushkin and Fefjulka whisper:

Pushkin: They should just leave me alone.

Fefjulka: How is that going to happen?

Pushkin: Just don't open it - and that will be that.

Fefjulka: They will start to scream!

Pushkin: **Let them scream.**

Aside too the audience: Someone's come to visit me, he knocks on my door. I say "come in!" and he comes in and says

M2: **"greetings! it's great I caught you at home!"**

Pushkin *acting out the following:* **And then I punch him in the face, and put my boot in his crotch, and he falls to the ground in pain. And then I give him a heel to the eyes. What's he doing whoring around here when not invited?**

Ivan:

Elizaveta Bam was Kharms's only play, presented at the Leningrad House of the Press in 1928. In this play, a murder mystery of sorts, a hapless adolescent heroine must deal with the capriciousness of governmental authority, accused by the secret police of the murder of one of the officers who is, at that moment, detaining and arresting her.

Our Mama and Michelangelo *from behind the door:*

Elizabeth Bam, open up! Elizabeth Bam, open up! This house, made of wood, called a hut, in which a candle burns and crackles.

Elizabeth Bam, open up! Elizabeth Bam, open up!

M1: Pushkin and Fefjulka hide under the table.

Pushkin: Shh!

Our Mama and Michelangelo: We know you're not sleeping! We're kicking down the door!

Our Mama and Michelangelo break down the door.

Our Mama and Michelangelo: Hello, good day, how's it going?

Fefjulka and Pushkin: Welcome! Welcome!

Michelangelo *shaking Pushkin's hand:* I am going to be appointed a Capuchin friar.

The guests present Fefjulka a bouquet of flowers.

Pushkin *takes the flowers:* What's all the fuss about flowers? It smells way better between a woman's legs.

Pushkin throws away the flowers and hands his portrait to Michelangelo.

Pushkin: Here's my portrait, so that you will always have a smart, alert, intelligent and handsome face to look at.

Fefjulka: How are you?

Michelangelo: Good, it's just that Christopher Columbus stuck a bicycle into our cook.

Fefjulka: Oh dear, the poor little cook!

Michelangelo: The poor thing is sitting in the kitchen writing a letter and the bike is sticking out of her!

M1 yells: *STOP!*

Our Mama *lighting a match:* Dearest Marina.

M1: *STOP!*

Fefjulka *climbing on the chair:* My shoulders are like the rising sun.

M1: *STOP!*

Our Mama *goes into a crouch:* My lower limbs are like pickles.

M1: STOP!

Fefjulka *climbs higher*: Hurrah! I have said nothing!

M1: STOP!

Our Mama *lying down on the floor*: No, no, nothing, nothing. g. g. psch. psch.

M1: STOP!

Fefjulka *raises her hand*: Ku - ni - na - ga - ni - li - wa - ni - bauuu.

M1: STOP!

Fefjulka:

Murka the kitten

Milk round his little face

jumped on the pillow

jumped on the oven

sprang sprung spring

hop hop hop hop hop hop hop.

Our Mama *calls*: Two doors, the shirt, two doors, the rope.

Pushkin: *Two carpenters just came in and wanted to know*

Pushkin & Michelangelo: *...what this is all about.*

Fefjulka: *Meatballs, meatballs! It's about meatballs.*

A table is set. They eat, drink and smoke. M1 & M2 assist with the set up.

Michelangelo: A man, who was hungry, sat at the table and ate meatballs. *His wife stood in front of him and said and said,*

Our Mama: *the meatballs contain too little meat.*

And he ate and ate and ate and ate and ate and ate until he felt a lethal heaviness in his stomach, and then, pushing away the treacherous food, he trembled and wept.

His golden pocket watch stopped ticking; his hair turned lighter and his eyes became bright as the sun; His ears fell to the floor like golden autumn leaves from the poplar tree.

And suddenly he died.

Music Interlude

Pushkin: *The tobacco was all gone, and Himmelkumov didn't have any more to smoke. He sucked on the empty pipe, but that only worsened his agony.*

So one hour went by *pause*

two hours *pause*

And suddenly the tobacco came back.

Michelangelo: *Pushkin, go to the pub and bring us a bottle of beer and some peas.*

Pushkin: *Aha, peas and a half bottle of beer, go to the pub and from there back here.*

Michelangelo: *No, not a half-bottle and a bottle of beer, and not in the pub, get some peas to go!*

Pushkin: *Now, I'll hide my coat in the pub and I'll put a half a pea on my head.*

Pushkin leaves

Michelangelo *calls after him:* If you buy a chicken, check if it has teeth. If it has teeth, it's no chicken!

Placard: Anecdotes from the life of Pushkin

Ivan:

Kharm's second wife Marina Tsvetaeva said that when she was very young: "The first thing I found out about Pushkin was that they killed him. Then I found out that Pushkin was a poet, and that Dantes was a Frenchman. Dantes took to hating Pushkin because he couldn't write poems himself, called him out for a duel, that is lured him out onto the snow and killed him there from a pistol in the stomach. So at three years of age I found out for sure that a poet had a stomach and - I have now in mind all the poets I've ever met - and for that poet's *stomach*, which so often goes hungry and in which Pushkin was killed, I have had no less concern than for his soul."

Our Mama: When Pushkin broke his legs, he used a board with wheels to get around on. His friends teased him by grabbing his wheels.

Michelangelo: Pushkin loved to throw rocks.

Whenever he saw some rocks he'd get to it. Sometimes he would just stand there red-faced, waving his arms and throwing rocks!

Fefjulka: Pushkin had four sons - all idiots! One of them couldn't even sit in a chair he kept falling off. But Pushkin didn't know how to sit on a chair either. You could just die laughing: everyone sitting at the table, and at one end Pushkin is falling off his chair, and at the other end his son.

Music

*They laugh like crazy, fall on their chairs, throw each other through the furniture,
pushing the cabinet to one side. Freeze.
Then they line up in formation and laugh together:*

Our Mama, Fefjulka & Michelangelo:

Kha-kha-kha
Da khye-khye-khye,
Khi-khi-khi
Da bookh-bookh!
Boo-boo-boo
Da bye-bye-bye,
Din-din-din
Da tryokh-tryokh!

Khi-khi-khi
Da kha-kha-kha,
Kho-kho-kho
Da gool-gool!

Gi-gi-gi
Da ga-ga-ga,
Go-go-go
Da bool-bool!

Pushkin enters wearing half a pea coat, or with a black eye, and holding a bottle, and a shopping bag.

Pushkin:

I see the world's distorted appearance,
I hear the whispers of the lyres performance, I grasp at the tip of a character
and pick out a word from the cabinet, I move the cabinet into its place,
I move the cabinet into its place
He moves the cabinet back in place
Thanks to its doughy materiality.

Echoed by M1:

I see the world askew
and hear the whispers of muffled lyres
and having by their tips the letters grasped
I lift up the word wardrobe,
and now I put it in its place,
it is the thick dough of substance.

Pushkin is knocked to the ground. Our Mama looks out of the closet or is rolled out on a cart.

Our Mama: Out of overwhelming curiosity there once leaned an older woman too far out the window, she lost her equilibrium, then she fell and then smashed to bits.

Fefjulka: Fell and then she smashed to bits!

Our Mama: Then there leaned a second older woman out of the window, so at the dead to look down upon. But out of an overwhelming curiosity she also lost her balance, then she fell and then smashed to bits.

Fefjulka: Fell and then she smashed to bits!

Our Mama: Then fell a third older woman out the window.

Fefjulka: Fell and then she smashed to bits!

Our Mama: And then a fourth one and then a fifth one.

Fefjulka: Fell and then they broke their necks!

Our Mama: When the sixth older woman out of the window had fallen ...

Pushkin: I am sick of all this watching!

Simultaneously, a cappella

Pushkin: I am interested only in nonsense, and only that which has no practical meaning. I am interested in life only in its absurd aspects.

Fefjulka: I am interested in worship and church singing. All manner of ceremony. Pocket watches and chronometers. Plastrons. The foundation of human sexual drive.

Our Mama: I am interested in prose; cinema and photography; ballet. Intimate human relationships, a perfect sound.

Michelangelo: I am interested in a number of simple phenomena - fistfights, lunch and dance events. Meat and dough. Vodka and beer. Popular astronomy.

Our Mama: The lack of persuasiveness of mathematical proofs. The construction of the circle. The chessboard as a special world. How something can be an isolated case.

Music

Fefjulka: Food. The preparation of certain dishes. Post mortem examination of the dead. How something can be an isolated case.

Pushkin: What people do with themselves when they are alone. Human faces. Aromas. To wash, to bath, the bathtub. Cleanliness and filth.

Michelangelo: Bodies. Growth. Hair. Cleanliness and filth.

Simultaneously

Pushkin: The wheel, sticks, walking sticks, staves. A colony of ants. Small smooth-haired canines. The Kabbalah. Pythagoras. A closet. A pipe. Smoking. Boredom.

Fefjulka: The wheel, sticks, walking sticks, staves. Small smooth-haired canines. The Kabbalah. Pythagoras. The feeling of the tropics. The dream. People of the Twentieth Century. Conservatism.

Our Mama: The wheel, sticks, walking sticks, staves. A colony of ants. Small smooth-haired canines. The Kabbalah. Pythagoras. Paper. Ink. Pencil. Boredom.

Michelangelo: The wheel. Membranes. Train stations. Staves. A colony of ants. Small smooth-haired canines. The Kabbalah. Pythagoras. Homemade philosophy. Conservatism. Miracles. Artworks without theoretical foundation. The transformation and destruction of space.

Music Interlude

Placard: On the death of Kazimir Malevich

Fefjulka with admiration for Michelangelo:

You have torn apart the stream of memory. Give me your eyes! I will open a window into my skull! Only a fly is your life, and your desire, a gluttonous pig. The thunder will lay low the helmet of your head.

Pe is - the inkwell of your words. Trr - your desires.

Agalton - Your tender memory.

All: La la la la la la la la la la ...

Fefjulka: Michelangelo! Where is your desk?

Placard: Prayer before going to sleep

Michelangelo *to the desk (M2):*

I greet you, desk.

For how many years have you supported my lamp and books and also many a colorful meatball.

I crawled underneath and behind you with pride, and collected the fuzzy beetles of thoughts.

He sweeps all the items from the desk (M2) to the floor.

Michelangelo *speaking as the desk (M2):*

What triggered you, madman

to hurl to the floor

all that man has entrusted to your expertise

He grabs the desk (M2) and pushes it before him.

Michelangelo *furiously to the desk (M2): Hold still, you woody bastard!*

Our Mama:

Stool Side table garbage pail

Tile oven Cuckoo Bath

Ball Broom Clothing Trunk

Shirt Iron Forge Fleas

Door is on the hinge

Tassels on a towel, four in total

Wooden stick screwed into a broom

Buttons on the roof, eight in total

Fefjulka & Our Mama *referring to the Cyrillic text on the folding panel, M1 translates:*

(Noti vizoo) **M1:** I see nothing

(vizoo mrak) I **M1:** see the darkness

(vizoo liliyo Doorak) **M1:** I see a lily, it's stupid

(syerDye kokoos) **M1:** There is a coconut

(vprochyem nyet) **M1:** although there is nothing

(mir Nye fokoos) **M1:** the world is not the focus

(v prochyem Da) **M1:** But in other matters, yes.

M1 & M2 manipulating F & OM like puppets, prompting their lines

Fefjulka: Let us now go to the next thing.

Our Mama: The next thing is longer than the previous thing and the foregoing is thicker than an onion.

They are tossed away.

Then...

Same as before: Michelangelo pushes Pushkin to a coffee house set up by M1 & M2. Perhaps a painting by Kazimir Malevich is held up behind the small table: "Cow and Violin," "The Aviator," or "An Englishman in Moscow."

Michelangelo: What shall I bring you?

Pushkin: I would like, if you have...

Michelangelo: What do you want?

Pushkin: Bœuf...

Michelangelo: Bœuf?

Pushkin joyfully: Bub!

Michelangelo astounded: Bub?

Pushkin nods: Bœuf Bub, Bœuf Bub.

Michelangelo thoughtfully: Bœuf Bub?

Pushkin: If you have it.

Musical Interlude.

After which: The four actors come onto the stage in colorful robes for:

Box 2: "Three left-hand hours"

Ivan: *in which we see played before us the legendary and only public appearance of the OBERIU in the Leningrad House of the Press*

M1: The Leningrad apartment is transformed into the Leningrad "House of the Press." An OBERIU evening is about to be held. Banners are rolled out. They say:

M2 reading from note cards : "We are not pieces of cake", "The Klaus goes into the sea", "Your mom is not our mom", "Captured lampu", "Art is a box."

*A divan is seen
Placard: The Divan Song*

Band:

Man is made of three parts, made of three parts,
made of three parts.

Kheoo-lya-lya, dryom-dryom-too-too!
Out of three parts a man is made.

M1: The curtain rises: M2: The divan is gone.

A beard, an eye and fifteen hands, and fifteen hands,
and fifteen hands.

Kheoo-lya-lya, dryom-dryom-too-too! And a rib.

M1: The curtain rises: M2: The divan appears.

But hands are not made of fifteen pieces, fifteen pieces,
fifteen pieces.
Kheoo-lya-lya, dryom-dryom-too-too! Fifteen pieces, but not hands.

M1: The curtain rises: M2: The divan is gone.

Fedot is made of three parts, Fedot is made,
Fedot is made.
Talltones: Kheoo-lya-lya, dryom-dryom-too-too! The man Fedot is made.

M1: The curtain rises: M2: The divan appears.

And I am not speaking of it speaking of it,
speaking of it.
Kheoo-lya-lya, dryom-dryom-too-too! I do not speak of it.

M1: The curtain rises: M2: The divan is gone.

But ribs are made of fifteen pieces, fifteen pieces,
fifteen pieces.
Kheoo-lya-lya, dryom-dryom-too-too! Not the right fifteen pieces!

M1: The curtain rises: M2: The divan appears. Pushkin: Pushkin is sitting on it.

Pushkin: There once lived an old woman. She lived and lived and lived and burned in the oven. Served her right. At least that was what the painter Michelangelo said.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: What else?

Pushkin: One time the painter Michelangelo went to the Panama Canal.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: What for?

Pushkin: To buy some rubber.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: What for?

Pushkin: To make a rubber band.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: What for?

Pushkin: To stretch it out. So.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: What else?

Pushkin: Oh yes: The painter Michelangelo destroyed his clock. The clock was running well, but he simply shattered it...

Michelangelo *smashing his watch on the floor:*

Time machine, go to Hell!

Stop ticking off the minutes!

What I recently was,

I will continue to be.

It was my will to be a glove,

to be an ox, a sphere,

tossed through the air

full to bursting.

Pushkin: In my opinion, words that start with a "P" mean "sphere."

Our Mama: For example, "sphere"?

Pushkin: No, that is a foreign word.

Fefjulka: And "circle"?

Pushkin: That is also a foreign word.

Our Mama: So it is true after all, and there are consequences. How strange it would be if two events occurred simultaneously.

Pushkin: A riddle:

Fefjulka: And what if instead of two events, there were eight soap bubbles?

Pushkin: Answer:

Fefjulka: Then naturally we would lie down together.

Pushkin: The answer was crisp and clear. A man was wrapped in paper.

Fefjulka: There is no paper.

Pushkin. The winter is here.

Michelangelo moves towards Pushkin, and from his mouth protrudes the handle of a large hammer. Michelangelo noisily pulls the hammer out of his mouth and hits Pushkin on the head. (This will probably be a plastic baseball bat.)

Michelangelo: So it's Winter. Time to turn on the ovens. Or what do you think?

Pushkin *holding his head:* **What do you have there?**

Michelangelo: **A hammer.** *He hits Pushkin on the head with the hammer.*

So what do you think, how will winter be this year, cold or warm?

Pushkin *holding his head:* Taking into account that the summer was rainy, it will likely be a colder winter.

Michelangelo *hitting Pushkin on the head with the hammer:* **But you know I am never cold.**

Pushkin: **Ow!**

Michelangelo *hitting Pushkin on the head with the hammer:* **What does that mean, ow?**

Pushkin: **I have a headache!**

Michelangelo *hitting Pushkin on the head with the hammer:* **Why?**

Pushkin: **I don't know.**

Michelangelo *hitting Pushkin on the head with the hammer:* **I'm not in any pain.**

Pushkin: **Son of a bitch! Hitting me constantly!**

Michelangelo throws the hammer and breaks Pushkin's arm.

Michelangelo: Shithead!

Pushkin: That is my arm.

Fefjulka: How are you going to wave now?

Pushkin: With a handkerchief.

Michelangelo: Ruckrr apprr wustrr wustrr
I'm wearing someone else's arm
ruckrr apprr wustrr wustrr

Our Mama & Fefjulka:

Where is the office clock?
If this little clockie dangling
its two weights a-hanging down
oldish clockie while still pending
flew an arc without a frown

Michelangelo:

ruckrr apprr wustrr wustrr
I destroyed the running clock
in its place the Karabister
on a plate the ruckrr apprr
right from milk-white clockface down
pancake's winding wustrr wustrr
wrapped into his dressing gown
Karabister sits enthroned

Women:

Where is the Karabister
where is Pushkin Ruckrr
single handed Ruckrr apprr
heals the Ruckrr apprr wustrr
his lost arm adjusting aptly

fixing fingers with a hammer
Ruckrr apprr wustrr hammers
Ruckrr apprr wustrr beats.

*Karabister (M1) appears on stilts with the endless hands of a clock instead of arms.
Perhaps accompanied by a Flexaphon (M2).*

Karabister: Guindalan!

All: The Karabister!

Karabister: Was it you who mutilated this citizen?

Michelangelo: I pulled his arm right out of the sleeve.

Karabister: Ex bex!

The women fall to their knees in front of the Karabister. Pushkin stands with both hands torn from his arms, wondering where they might fit in his pockets.

Fefjulka to Karabister:

You are a god of nine legs

Show me your belly with the numbers

And point to the hour of your death with the wooden head.

Karabister sung by Our Mam, M2 lipsinks: I will not speak to you Because I am stronger
Because I am more worthy Because I am a lantern Because I am a cavern
Because because because because be b b

The Karabister's alarm goes off.

Placard: The lecture

Ivan:

For those of you who may be lost in this evening's performance, let me set this all in some context. Our protagonist Kharms and Alexander Vvedensky and their friends, who all came to bad ends, were members of the OBERIU, aka the Union of Real Art. In their founding document, their declaration from a time of artistic declarations, they spoke of an art where words had their real meanings, naming real objects, but where those objects exist in a universe devoid of their common associations.

Theater was a natural space in which to collide these words and their objects, and with this in mind the Klagenfurter Ensemble asked our composer to write this opera based on Kharms, who possibly took his last name from Sherlock Holmes, whom he admired, dressing in the cap and pipe and cape associated, and ten years later, to introduce him to VADA, the librettists, consisting of Felix Strasser and Yulia Izmaylova, who admire Kharms and the OBERIU, who run a very small theater of their own, 1.3 by 1.3 meters, 4 seats, or 2 seats if there is a ballet. They, the

librettists, met performing in a theater in Moscow run by troublemaker artist Kirill Ganin, who said, "The apple of knowledge was never touched and still depends on the tree. To make this situation tangible, all players play naked at Kirill Ganin." He too was arrested, multiple times, for productions which ran afoul of the current Russian administration, decrying the intrigues between the Kremlin and the Orthodox Church, one time his theater raided by government troops and himself arrested on charges of staging a pornographic show, and imprisoned and mistreated.

From the Pussy Riot closing statement: "We may be in prison, but I do not consider us defeated. Just as the dissidents were not defeated; although they disappeared into mental institutions and prisons, they pronounced their verdict upon the regime. The art of creating the image of an epoch does not know winners or losers. It was the same with the OBERIU poets, who remained artists until the end, inexplicable and incomprehensible. Purged in 1937, Alexander Vvedensky wrote, "The incomprehensible pleases us, the inexplicable is our friend."

Pushkin: *Where were we? Oh right! The woman is a workbench of love.*

Fefjulka & Our Mama:

Ivan Ivanovich tells us
Kika Koka Ku tells us
Over the fence tells us
Tell us of the railroad
Why the railroad?
We don't want a railroad

Dearest needle Dinnsunn da
Di da ka ku Dinnsunn da
Didelt to the Dinnsunn da

Pushkin & Michelangelo:

There once was a strong man.
Was a carpenter this man.
Smearred with glue this man.

Made some chairs, made some tables
With a hammer made some tables
Out of walnut made some tables.

And they called this man
Ivan Like his father named Ivan
He was also called Ivan

Fefjulka & Our Mama:

And he had a wife
No mother, just a wife

All:

No mother, just a wife

Pushkin & Michelangelo:

But so how is she called now

I simply do not know now

I have just forgotten now

Ivan Ivanytsch to her speaks

Very smartly to her speaks

Please kiss me, he to her speaks

Fefjulka & Our Mama:

His wife said to him: you pig!

You are my husband and a pig!

Go to hell you pig!

I don't want to be with you

I don't want to do it

Since I don't I will not

Pushkin & Michelangelo:

Ivan Ivanytsch takes his handkerchief

And unfolds his handkerchief

Puts it back, his handkerchief

Will you not, he said to her

What to do, he said to her

I'll leave now, he said to her

Fefjulka & Our Mama:

His wife said to him: you pig!

You are my husband and a pig!

Go to hell you pig!

I know I am not for you

I do not want to know you

I want to spit on you

Pushkin & Michelangelo:

Ivan Ivanytsch was dumb

Among other things he was dumb

Dideldei he was dumb

Fefjulka & Our Mama:

And the wife kicked him again.
Wound up and pow! again.
And then hit him once again.

Punched him on the ear after
Knocked his teeth out after
Struck him again after!

Pushkin & Michelangelo:

Ivan Ivanytsch gasps for air
Gasps and gasps for air
Gasp p p p ps for air

Will you not, he said to her
What to do, he said to her
I'll leave now, he said to her

Fefjulka & Our Mama:

And his wife said to him: you pig!
You are my husband and a pig!
Go to hell you pig!

Pushkin & Michelangelo:

So he went and went away
With the coach he road away
With the train he went away

And the wife stayed here
And so I stayed here

All:

And we both stayed here

la la la la la la
la la la la la la
la la la la la la
Dritsa-dritsa umtsa-tsa
Hey!

Musical Interlude.
The Oberiuts take off their costumes.

Ivan over music:

Take for example, the story of Tukhachevsky, Marshal of the Soviet Union, commander in chief of the Red Army, suddenly arrested in 1937, tortured, his confession, which survives, spattered with blood, on trial with eight generals, all the judges terrified, five of them later executed, and Tukhachevsky shot once in the back of the head in the execution chamber in the basement of the prison, the one with the sloping floor for hosing, where his torturer who designed the room was later shot, Tukhachevsky who when accused said "I feel I'm dreaming", his wife shot, his mother shot, one of his sisters and both his brothers shot, three sisters, two former wives and his quite young daughter sent to the camps, and, since he liked music and befriended various musicians and writers, they too were arrested and shot.

Box 3: Defeatist Propaganda

Ivan: *in which occurs the arrest and the interrogation of Pushkin*

Same as before: Michelangelo pushes Pushkin to a coffee house set up by M1 & M2. Perhaps a painting by Kazimir Malevich is held up behind the small table: "Cow and Violin," "The Aviator," or "An Englishman in Moscow."

Pushkin: Give me, if you have it, a Bœuf Bub

Michelangelo: Don't give it to him.

Pushkin *the waiter looks at him, startled:* a Bœuf...

Michelangelo: I'll throw you right out the door.

Pushkin *threateningly:* What do you mean?

Michelangelo: All right, all right, go ahead.

Pushkin: I will not. I am a poet.

Pushkin stands up and holds out his identity card to the waiter.

Placard: Four Illustrations of how a new idea dumbfounds a person who is not prepared for it.

Michelangelo: I think you are a piece of shit.

Ivan:

When Kharms was first arrested on the tenth of December 1931, his confession included: "In the book *What One Must Prepare for Winter*," a children's book on preparations for winter, "I substituted a science lesson for the theme of the pioneer

camp, and shifted the child's attention to those things which absolutely need to be prepared for winter." He was sentenced to three years in prison.

Pushkin climbs on a stool, then the table. Thunder. The light goes out. When the light comes back on, Pushkin is holding a sphere over his head.

Pushkin: I pulled a sphere out of my head.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: (Ya vinool iz guolovi shar) I took the sphere from my head. I took the sphere from my head. Michelangelo: Put it back. Put it back. Put it back.

Pushkin: No, I won't put it back!

Fefjulka & Our Mama: (Nyet, nye polozoo!) No, do not put it back! No, do not put it back! No, do not put it back!

Michelangelo: Then simply don't.

Pushkin: OK, I won't put it back.

Michelangelo: All right then.

Pushkin: I've done it, I've won.

Fefjulka & Our Mama: (vot ya i pobyedil) I won! I won!

Michelangelo: Yes, you've won, now just calm down!

Pushkin: No, I won't calm down!

Fefjulka & Our Mama: No, I won't be quiet! No, I won't be quiet!

Michelangelo: You are a mathematician, But, the truth is, you're not too smart.

Pushkin: No, I'm smart and I know a lot!

Fefjulka & Our Mama: (Nyet, oomyon i znayo ochyen? mnogo) No, I'm smart and I know a lot!

Michelangelo: A whole lot, but it's all crap.

Gong

Fefjulka:

And here begins the second part - the crowd says its last goodbyes to the individual.

Michelangelo:

Germans plunder Russian land.

I can't believe it.

Give heed.

The plunder.

Shame on the Germans, shame on Kant.

Sorry flies away, a boring joke.

*Placard: "Where. When"
a poem by Vvedensky*

Michelangelo:

Farewell sea, farewell sand,

how high you are, Oh mountain land!

*The painter Michelangelo drops dead.
He is placed in a coffin, covered by assorted props.*

Placard: Requiem Mass for the artist Michelangelo

Fefjulka & Pushkin: Lord have mercy upon us!

Fefjulka: The fish and the oaks present to him a wine grape and a little bit of terminal joy.

Pushkin: The oaks said to him:

Fefjulka & Pushkin: We're growing.

Fefjulka: The fish said to him:

Fefjulka & Pushkin: We are swimming.

Pushkin: The oaks then asked him:

Fefjulka & Pushkin: What time is it?

Fefjulka: The fish:

Fefjulka & Pushkin: Please have mercy upon us if it's OK with you.

Pushkin: What will He say to the fishes and the oaks? He can no longer say:

Fefjulka & Pushkin: Thank you.

Fefjulka: *The river running majestically over the face of the earth.*

Pushkin: The majestically flowing river.

Fefjulka: Bearing its waves majestically.

Pushkin: *The river like a Czar.*

Fefjulka: He took his leave, so, then.

Pushkin: *Like so.*

Fefjulka: And he lay like a notebook on the banks of the river.

Fefjulka & Pushkin: Notebook, farewell!

Placard: Interrogation

Our Mama in a Soviet uniform, glues a beard to her upper lip and becomes comrade Dzhughashvili. Our Mama dissolves the assembly. The interrogation follows. During this Fefjulka packs her suitcase.

Water may be involved, ala water boarding, head dunked in a bucket

Our Mama: Does writing benefit the people?

Pushkin: It brings to them wondrous benefits.

Our Mama: And why?

Pushkin: Because a knock on the head starts them thinking.

Our Mama: To think about what?

Pushkin: The value of life. Who receives the benefits.

Our Mama: And if it does, what then?

Pushkin: It depends. Where the stars go, why they go, and what will be, even if they stand still.

Our Mama: Can you explain that more closely?

Pushkin: So. Now we consider the air. What power does it have? It has power. Its strength is in its body, and so goes for man.

Our Mama: And when man does not go?

Pushkin: Then he sits. Sits on his bones, one against another, until he dies.

Our Mama: And when he dies?

Pushkin: Then he is a worm.

Our Mama: Thank you. Now I understand how everything is connected.

Pushkin to Fefjulka: Goodbye.

Placard: Fefjulka goes to Venezuela.

Ivan:

Arrested again 23 August 1941 during the Nazi siege of Leningrad for spreading, not in his unpublished adult works, but in those he wrote for children, "slandorous and defeatist sentiments, in an attempt to cause panic and create dissatisfaction with the Soviet government." He began to show signs of mental distress and was committed to the prison psychiatric hospital. "His delusions are characterized by absurdities," wrote the prison psychiatrist who examined him. "To keep his thoughts concealed he wraps his head in a headband or a small rag." One day, his wife Marina brought him a packet of food, as she had done twice before, during this siege where the residents of the city had begun to eat their pets and one another. But on this day, she was made to wait, and then, after several minutes, was told "Passed away on the second of February" and the packet was thrown back out to her.

Our Mama on the phone: Let's go! What is this?

Pushkin: Here, in this book, is written all our desires and their fulfillment. Read this book and you will understand how vain our desires are. And you will also understand how easy it is to fulfill the desires of another, and how hard it is to fulfill a desire of your own.

Our Mama: What's with the solemn tone? That's the way Indian chiefs talk.

Pushkin: From such a book, one can speak only in the loftiest tones. I take off my hat just thinking about it.

Our Mama: And does one wash one's hands before touching this book?

Pushkin: Yes, one's hands must be washed.

Our Mama: You should wash your feet too, just in case.

Pushkin: That is not clever. Moreover, it's rude.

Our Mama: So what's this book all about?

Pushkin: The title of this book is a secret.

Our Mama: Hee hee hee!

Pushkin: The name of this book is: *(much coughing and confusion, the title cannot be barely heard)* _____.

Great ear-and-eye-numbing mumbo jumbo. The audience is blinded by a lightning flash. Pushkin disappears. We hear only his voice.

Our Mama: My God! What is this? Pushkin!

Pushkin: Comrade Dzhugashvili! Where am I?

Our Mama: Where are you? I can't see you!

Pushkin: And where are you? What are these spheres?

Our Mama: What should I do? Pushkin, can you hear me?

Pushkin: Yes! But what happened? And what's with all these spheres?

Our Mama: Can you move?

Pushkin: Yes! But do you see the spheres, Dzhugashvili?

Our Mama: What spheres?

Din. Searing Light. Red bouncing balls rain down on Our Mama.

Our Mama: Aaah! Pushkiiiiiniiiiiiiiiin!

Ivan: Gradually man loses his shape and turns into a sphere. And, having become a sphere, he loses all his desires.

*Maybe at the same time, we hear the loud laughter of the Oberiuten (Band).
From the ceiling swings a big picture that shows Vvedensky and other Oberiuts at the
table, Charms with a pipe in his mouth. Or not.*

Placard: Your Mama is not Our Mama.

End