



RUSSIAN TRANSPORT

BY ERIKA SHEFFER



**DRAMATISTS
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INC.**



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Originally produced in New York City by The New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director).

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For my father, Yuri Sheffer

RUSSIAN TRANSPORT was presented by the New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director; Geoff Rich, Executive Director) in New York City, opening on January 30, 2012. It was directed by Scott Elliott; the set design was by Derek McLane; the costume design was by Ann Hould-Ward; the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski; the sound design was by Bart Fasbender; the dialect coach was Doug Paulson; the fight director was David Anzuelo; the assistant director was Marie Masters; the production supervisor was Peter R. Feuchtwanger/PRF Productions; and the production stage manager was Valerie A. Peterson. The cast was as follows:

DIANA Janeane Garofalo
MISHA Daniel Oreskes
BORIS Morgan Spector
MIRA Sarah Steele
ALEX Raviv Ullman

Russian translations and coaching provided by Vera Berlyavsky.

CHARACTERS

ALEX — 18, a senior in high school.

MIRA — 14, Alex's sister, a freshman in high school.

MISHA — Father to Mira and Alex. Russian immigrant.

DIANA — Mother to Mira and Alex. Russian immigrant.

BORIS — Diana's brother. Russian immigrant.

SONYA, VERA, SVETA — Three different Russian teenagers, played by the actress playing Mira.

PLACE

Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

TIME

The present.

THE SCRIPT

When words have hyphens between them (I-mean-for-your-GPA-You know-what's-GPA?), a quick change of thought is indicated.

Sometimes this is used in indicating the rhythm, as well.

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

A dash (—) indicates an interruption or quick cue pickup.

English translations immediately follow Russian dialogue.

SET AND LIGHTS

The play is set in a house; however, there is room for an expressionist or poetic interpretation. The lines blur. The car scenes should be staged theatrically, with minimal additional scenery. Lighting, actor placement and the audience's imagination ought to do the work.

A NOTE ON THIS FAMILY

This is a family of noise. With the exception of Boris, they most often speak before they think. They are not measured in their anger, fear, humor or passion.

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ACT ONE

Scene 1

The house. Stage right we see the office of the car service. There is a door that leads offstage to the dispatch booth downstairs, and a street exit. Another door connects to the living/dining room area, which occupies stage left. There is an exit to an offstage kitchen, and another to the street. A staircase leads upstairs, where we see Mira's bedroom. A song like Vladimir Visotsky's "My Gypsy Song" plays as an air mattress inflates within a cabinet in the wall unit. The cabinet doors are pushed open. The bed blows up. It rests in a downstage corner. Lights bump up. Mira sits at the table.*

MIRA. (*Calling upstairs.*) And-it's-like-a-cross-cultural-thing? It's like you learn about other cultures — About broadening-like-expanding-your experiences and stuff! Ma! (*No answer.*) Ma, it's like really good for college applications, but also for your world-view! I mean for your GPA-You-know-what's-GPA? It's grade-point average. (*Diana enters with two full garbage bags and unpacks clothes into a cabinet.*)

DIANA. It's expensive, no?

MIRA. I-guess-but-I-mean-they-got-scholarships.

DIANA. Uh-hah —

MIRA. And the one I applied for is in Florence.

DIANA. It's the worst anti-Semites in Florence. Only in Arab countries is worse.

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

MIRA. That's bullshit —
DIANA. / Shht!
MIRA. The shortest one is only four weeks, which is nothing, which is like half of break —
DIANA. You gonna be away from all you friends.
MIRA. Who? Ilona?
DIANA. Don't say like Ilona like you better, like you special.
MIRA. I'm not.
DIANA. You not —
MIRA. Arrright, I know. Hey-is-that-my-sweatpants? Whatayou doing?
DIANA. You sleeping on za air mattress, now.
MIRA. What? Nuh-uh! (*Diana continues unpacking.*) I'm not sleeping down here —
DIANA. Shut-tup —
MIRA. Why can't he sleep on / the —
DIANA. Shut-tup.
MIRA. Greesha slept on the air mattress when he came. I'm not giving up my room.
DIANA. Is different with Boris.
MIRA. Why —
DIANA. Because-I'm-telling-you-so-shut-you-mouth.
MIRA. If you, like, give me a reason, instead of just talking to me like I'm RETARDED, maybe I wouldn't —
DIANA. Listen to me.
MIRA. What?
DIANA. From now on you take you clothes into the bathroom when you shower, you understand?
MIRA. You're so gross.
DIANA. And wear a bra.
MIRA. I don't need to.
DIANA. You need to! I'm looking at you right now. You like a gorilla, swinging from tree to tree. (*She tosses an alarm clock on the mattress.*) Travel alarm, it got the Indiglo lights.
MIRA. This is bullshit.
DIANA. I told you watch your mouth? I told you —
MIRA. Oh my God, I hate you.
DIANA. Tell me again. In my face, tell me.
MIRA. (*Looking her in the face.*) I hate you —
DIANA. Aie, you sucha bitch —

MIRA. If I'm such a bitch, why can't I go just away this summer?
Why you wanna bitch in the house, anyway?

DIANA. For fun. *(Mira receives a text message.)*

MIRA. You can't just kick me out of my own room, you know.

DIANA. Listen, if I want your kidney, I take it. If I want blood
from you body, it's mine —

MIRA. Okay, that's like full-on abuse —

DIANA. You skull? I gonna crush it like a nectarine — Check-za
— texting-arready! *(Mira looks at her phone.)*

MIRA. Coney Island Avenue.

DIANA. By where?!

MIRA. I don't know.

DIANA. Call Alex, please — He should be home arready.

MIRA. Whatayou, Helen Keller?

DIANA. Ungrateful. You are very ungrateful girl. Call you brother.

MIRA. *(Dialing.)* Greesha slept down here when he came — It's-
not-fair.

DIANA. Fair? Your grandmother was raped by Nazis. This is fair,
this life? Well?

MIRA. It's ringing. *(In the distance, there is the sound of a dog bark-
ing. Alex enters the office, and the barking gets louder.)*

ALEX. Arrright, arrright, I'm here!

DIANA. Slava Bogu! *[Thank God!]*

MIRA. What is that?

ALEX. It's a dog.

MIRA. Why you got a dog barking for your ringer?

ALEX. It's only for when *you* call.

MIRA. Why?

ALEX. Figure it out.

DIANA. Hey, you bring something? Wine-flower-cake-nothing?

ALEX. Whadayou want-I'll-get it right now.

DIANA. I don' wanna thing — What-should I want?

ALEX. So lee me alone, arready — Jesus!

DIANA. Mira, go take the pot off the stove, please — The *pil-
menye [ravioli]* gonna be too soft. *(No answer.)* Mira. *(To Alex.)*
Ach, give me a minute. *(Diana exits to the kitchen.)*

ALEX. What's wrong with you? ... Are you gonna cry?

MIRA. No.

ALEX. Good. It smells when you cry.

MIRA. No it doesn't —

ALEX. I'm so fuckin' hungry, I'm running here like it's ridiculous. Jesus, you know what I had today? School, Store, Car Service, back to Verizon. And I had like a fucking smoothie — that's it. A whole day, and that's it?

MIRA. My phone's not taking the charge.

ALEX. Yeah? You took the battery out and force a restart?

MIRA. Yeah, it's not taking. (*As Alex resets the phone.*) I told you I did that already.

DIANA. (*Reentering.*) Oh, you're talking / now? —

ALEX. You're overcharging it —

DIANA. (*To Alex.*) Take your shoes off!

MIRA. I'm not / overcharging —

DIANA. No respect for the carpet. Nobody has respect for the carpet.

ALEX. I bet you fifty bucks. You did it with the last one. What, you plug it in at night? Until you wake up, it's like seven hours. It's too long. I told you it's too long, and now you fuckin' breakin' another one, again?

MIRA. I'm not / I swear —

ALEX. I can't like guarantee you anything. It's not under the warranty. (*To Diana.*) You know where they at / or what?

DIANA. What, you have somewhere to be?

ALEX. Maybe.

DIANA. Maybe? What's this, maybe?

ALEX. Nothing, I —

DIANA. What?

ALEX. You don' have to know all my business.

DIANA. Oh-ho, now he got business?

ALEX. No, I / just —

DIANA. You got stock and bond for business? Hah? I can buy stock from you, I c'buy bond?

ALEX. Yeah, I'm going public.

DIANA. Mira, get the vinegar. (*Mira ignores her.*) I'm very sorry Mira — Please get the vinegar — I'm very sorry —

MIRA. Arright look — I'll sleep down here, but only for tonight.

DIANA. Okay-Thank-you-You-a-good-girl.

MIRA. I'm not doing this for you —

DIANA. Okay —

MIRA. It's for Boris.

MIRA. So he feels valued, or / whatever —

DIANA. Good girl. (*Mira exits.*)

ALEX. What's with her —

DIANA. Who-the-fuck-knows. *(She reaches on top of the wall unit and pulls down a manila envelope, as he gives her cash from his wallet. She counts it out.)* You stop by dispatch just now? You see some drivers, or what?

ALEX. You don't gotta always be checking up on them.

DIANA. Alex. They steal. This is everything?

ALEX. You-know-it's-like, someone calls, they get on the radio and send a car out. Even if I'm not there, the tree still fuckin' fell in the forest ... You know, like how if a tree falls in the forest —

DIANA. What you think only the government is stealing you money? No, no, no. You know what Lenin is saying and what Trotsky is saying? In capitalism the workers is stealing from you also. Because they Jealous for the owners. This is everything? Car service and Verizon?

ALEX. I told you, yes. It's gonna cover this month or what? *(She makes an "I don't know" gesture.)*

DIANA. Hey, lemme ask you stupid question-just-like-putting-za-bug in-za-bee. You think what you gonna say to you uncle, tonight?

ALEX. Why I gotta practice? Maybe he should practice what he's gonna say to me.

DIANA. I'm gonna skin you alive —

ALEX. Seriously, he's the one just getting here — Like, maybe he gonna need me to get *him* a job. I'm the one who's got like — Who's like connected or whatever.

DIANA. Where you "connecting"?

ALEX. Just like — At Verizon.

DIANA. Hey. At Verizon?

ALEX. Yeah ... Yes! *(Mira reenters with Swiss Fudge Stella d'Oro cookies.)*

MIRA. Alex: How old do you think someone should be before they can get on an airplane alone?

DIANA. You better put za fucking cookies away —

MIRA. Fourteen is old. There's kids whose parents get divorced, who fly when they're five —

DIANA. Shhh! ... I hear the garage door. *(To Alex.)* You hear?

ALEX. I'm not a fucking coyote.

DIANA. Get za booze. *(Mira gets shot glasses. Alex pulls out bottles from the liquor cabinet.)* Amaretto, also. *(The door bursts open. Misha barrels in, all bull in china shop, followed by Boris, who brings luggage. The commotion of greeting.)*

RUSSIAN TRANSPORT

by Erika Sheffer

3M, 2W (doubling)

RUSSIAN TRANSPORT is a suspenseful family drama set in the Russian Jewish community of Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. Diana and Misha, an immigrant couple, run a struggling car service while trying to carve out the American Dream for their teenagers, Alex and Mira. When Diana's mysterious brother Boris arrives to stay with them, family loyalty is tested. For Alex and Mira, Uncle Boris is an exciting addition to their home, but soon Alex is pulled into his uncle's dangerous world. Laced with humor and intrigue, RUSSIAN TRANSPORT captures the complex layers of one very particular immigrant experience.

"What's this? A thoughtful, well-written domestic drama with something original to say about immigrant families living by old world values in a new world culture? Pinch me!"

—Variety

"[An] engrossing moral thriller."

—Time Out New York

"It's a good old-fashioned delicacy: a solid yarn, well told."

—The New York Post

"It is impossible to dismiss Sheffer's command of storytelling and zestful, pungent dialogue."

—TheaterMania

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