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*Learning and Communicating:
Lecturing at The American Center in Moscow*

On February 7th, I had the opportunity to give a lecture on international business and the performing arts at *The American Center* in Moscow. Since beginning my Fulbright studies, I have been helping a company called *Stage Holding Russia* on an ad hoc basis. I used *Stage Holding Russia* as a case study in my presentation to examine how the capital and management experience of an international holding company can be used to open a new market in Russia: the market for commercial theater.

Preparing the Lecture

My goal in preparing this lecture was to combine my academic background in business with my personal knowledge of the arts and apply these to the Russian market. I knew that *Stage Holding Russia* was the first company attempting to set up a long-running series of commercial theater productions in Russia. I had previously worked with the General Manager of *Stage Holding Russia*, Dmitry Bogachev, on a different Russian musical (*Nord-Ost*) back in 2002, and this had alerted me to the challenges of marketing musicals to Russian theater goers. *Stage Holding Russia*, however, was in a unique position because it had access to the resources of an international holding company that specializes in world entertainment production. *Stage Holding International*, a UK-based conglomerate, operates in eight countries in the areas of musical productions, theaters, and tickets. It employs over 4,500 people worldwide and opened its Russian office in fall 2004.

To prepare my lecture, it was necessary to understand how *Stage Holding Russia* was utilizing the resources and expertise of its parent company to reduce start-up risks in the Russian market. First, I attended *Stage Holding Russia*'s press conference in December. At this conference, the company announced that its first musical production in Moscow would be a Russian variant of the smash-hit Broadway musical *Cats*. Over 70 journalists were in attendance, including representatives from radio, newspapers, magazines and television.

Later in December, I conducted an interview with one of the two main investors of *Stage Holding Russia*, Derk Sauer. Sauer is the CEO of *Independent Media*, the company that produces such popular Russian publications as *The Moscow Times*, *The Saint Petersburg Times*, *Vedemosti*, and *Cosmopolitan*. During our interview, we discussed the attractiveness of the Russian theater market and the long-term plans of the company.

I also researched and wrote an article for the *American Chamber of Commerce* highlighting how local business support is fostering the arts in Moscow. Finally, during my meeting with Sergey Gromov, Chief Marketing Officer of *Stage Holding Russia*, I finalized the content of my presentation and obtained video clips of *Cats*.

Giving the Lecture

It was an interesting group of people that gathered at *The American Center* to hear the lecture. Many of the audience members were Russian academics interested in improving their English comprehension skills. Others were American Fulbright students studying in Moscow, and still others were simply interested in attending a Monday night lecture.

As I presented the material, I could see that the audience understood the relationships and conclusions I was drawing between international business and commercial theater. At the end of the lecture, a very interesting question and answer period occurred. Some of the Russians were curious to know more about my own personal background and asked about my company in the United States. There were quite a few questions challenging *Stage Holding Russia*'s decision to bring *Cats* to Moscow. Comments such as, "*Cats* is already an old, out-dated musical" and

“Why wasn’t a musical like *Mamma Mia* or *The Lion King* chosen?” were heard. There were also strong beliefs expressed about the motives of American business. One audience member repeatedly said that, “commercial theater and American business are ways of making lots of money while destroying local art and culture.”

Fostering Communication

After giving this lecture, it was clear to me that many Western stereotypes are still prevalent in Russia today. The need for cultural exchanges, business partnerships and open discussions is evident. Programs such as Fulbright and The ACTR help foster cross-cultural interaction among students, but I believe both business and the arts can and must play a greater role in dispelling Russian and American stereotypes in the near future.

To Learn More About Rebecca Davis’ studies and travel experiences, visit The Rebecca Davis Dance Company at www.rebeccadavidance.com or email davis@rebeccadavidance.com

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