



## Cast

<b>Khlestakov</b>	Giles Allen-Bowden
<b>Maria</b>	Anna Butcher
<b>Khlopov</b>	John Fenner
<b>Postmaster</b>	Elaine Freeborn
<b>Osip</b>	Jeremy Heynes
<b>Bobchinsky</b>	Harrison Horsley
<b>Anna</b>	Cheryl Laverick
<b>Dobchinsky</b>	Dylan Marshall
<b>Lyapkin Tyapkin</b>	Mark Oram
<b>The Mayor</b>	Matthew Salisbury





## **The Government Inspector review - A timeless tale cleverly told on Leamington stage**

By Charles Essex

The human condition is universal and timeless so Gogol's play, written in 1836 and cleverly adapted by Nick Le Mesurier, is still relevant, especially as it depicts the pervasive corruption and self interest in local public services.

Khlestakov (Giles Allen-Bowden) is a not very successful grifter, only one step ahead of the law. His good fortune is to land in a small provincial town that is awaiting the arrival of a government inspector, but whose identity is not known. Initially fêted by the mayor (Matthew Salisbury), Khlestakov is bemused by the attentions of the town's hierarchy, but Giles clearly portrays Khlestakov's growing realisation that he can milk their sycophancy as they are more 'on the make' than he is. His narcissism even extends to seducing the mayor's wife (Cheryl Laverick) and daughter (Anna Butcher).

All the characters are blatantly self-serving and boastful, but several comic characterisations give the play a light touch and serve to heighten the deviousness of all involved. Bobchinsky (Harrison Horsley) and Dobchinsky (Dylan Marshall) are foppish dandies oozing privilege, affectation and egocentric entitlement whilst John Fenner has the right level of grammatical pedantry as Khlopov the schoolteacher. Jeremy Haynes as Osip, Khlestakov's old retainer, was wonderfully non-committal when being quizzed about his master, while continually returning to a theme of being hungry. A clever touch was to include updated and current references in the script and also have characters give brief asides to the fourth wall to reveal their thoughts.

Anna and Cheryl spar and bicker as Giles plays them off against each other with disingenuous promises of love. Both they and the mayor are blinded by egoism and self-interest and allow themselves to be easily fooled.

All the cast were word-perfect. The simple set of door frame and table and chairs were sufficient to set the scenes.

Matthew Salisbury did especially well as both a leading character and the director. This play wonderfully epitomised why people feel disenfranchised and disenchanting by those 'in power.'

### **Classic political satire proves comedy gold**

Leamington Observer

It may be nearly 200 years since Gogol penned his great political satire, but it remains as topical as ever, primarily for the simple reason there has always been, and there remains, far too many corrupt greedy idiots in charge.

And such is the case in this unnamed town where its unscrupulous officials are more than a little nervous, having just received word a government inspector is on his way to investigate them. It doesn't take long to convince themselves the mysterious lavish-spending stranger at the local inn is their government inspector.

Cue all sorts of farcical fun and games in this new adaptation by Nick Le Mesurier, who gives it a refreshingly modern nip and tuck, quoting everyone from Braveheart to Blair and the big guy down the road in Stratford, but while losing none of Gogol's original bite. Director Matthew Salisbury – who also plays The Mayor – takes Nick's energetic adaptation and runs with it.

This thoroughly good romp of a production zips along missing no opportunity to lampoon one and all via some good old fashioned unabashed silliness, with the comedy of the story taking precedence over detailed factual accuracy with absolutely no apology.

The scene is cleverly set for the mistaken identity mayhem about to unfold with a Mechanicals-like twist as the cast arrive on stage masquerading as a Russian touring group. The play within a play feel is maintained with Amy Carroll's open design allowing the cast to wait visibly in the wings before their next scene.

Subtle this production is not, but neither does it pretend to be, from its bawdy seaside postcard humour to marvellously colourful mish-mash period costumes.

We are presented with a jolly ragbag of residents who are all on the make in one way or another.

Salisbury's Mayor – a role that by his own admission he took on through necessity rather than choice – is the architect in chief of this merry band of self-serving swindlers who has no interest in improving the town. His simple goal is holding onto power and lining his own pockets.

And he's prepared to give everything, even his daughter's hand in marriage, to the suspected Government Inspector Khlestakov, played with increasing gusto by Giles Allen-Bowden as he comes to realise he's on a nice little earner.

Others have different ambitions. Maria (Anna Butcher), wife of the philandering Mayor, and her daughter (Cheryl Laverick) are both looking for love, while Khlestakov's servant Osip (Jeremy Haynes) simply wants a decent bed and a square meal.

With the comedy turned up to 11, full advantage is taken by John Fenner's nerve-wracked schoolteacher Khlopov, while foppish landowners Bobchinsky (Harrison Horsley) and Dobchinsky (Dylan Marshall) spark well off each other.

There may be a rough edge here and there but in no way does it spoil an engaging ever-topical story which is both engagingly, and often hilariously, told.

### **Inspecting The Government Inspector @ The Loft**

Culture's Coffee Review

Gogol's *The Government Inspector* has been gracing the stage since 1836. This new translation by Nick Le Mesurier updates and clarifies this older text, bar a few surprising anachronisms, making it a delight for modern audiences and perhaps tying it into current politics. Running until the 15<sup>th</sup> June, *The Government Inspector* eases us into the corrupt underbelly of a small and seemingly genteel Russian town and the machinations of the townsfolk as they strive to impress who they think is the visiting government inspector from St. Petersburg- but is he all that he seems?

The play is strongest in its ensemble scenes, with roles delivered with relish and a wonderful flair of comedy by John Fenner as Khlopov and Elaine Freeborn as the prying Postmaster. Every moment that they are onstage is a gem. anticipated and cherished as the actors hover by the side of the stage in Brechtian fashion.

However, none of the ensemble scenes would be complete without the double act of Dobchinsky (Dylan Marshall) and Bobchinsky (Harrison Horsley), who bounce off each other with such energy, speed, and aplomb that make their scenes seem to pass by in seconds.

The title of stage lynchpin, though, undoubtedly goes to Matthew Salisbury, who, along with beautiful and smooth

direction, also portrays the downfall of the Mayor with charisma and a great deal of presence, especially in his final scene. Although the finale could have been a little snappier, we are left with a vignette that manages to summarise the entire play in one.

The world of *The Government Inspector* is deftly created with a fresh, floral, and summery set that encapsulates the town that we are thrown into- or what it hopes to be- in the first scene. This starts the play off with a vivacious pace and lively dialogue that continue throughout, even though there are moments when it could have been pared down.

Apart from a few jumps and contradictions, the story of *The Government Inspector* is exactly what a plot should be. It is timeless, humorous, and filled with astute character details, as well as enjoyable twists, turns, and deceptions that are a marvel to watch, all framed by the ease of Nick Le Mesurier's modern script.

### A Night of Laughter and Charm

The Boar (extract)

A simple set consisting of little more than a door frame, window, a few chairs and an unchanging background, was enough to evoke the Russian countryside, with the actors bringing this village to life. A particular highlight comes in the form of John Fenner's performance as Khlopov, a bumbling school teacher whose antics often leave him the butt of the joke, and the recipient of some of the night's biggest laughs. The quickfire script bolsters these laughs, and the use of numerous fourth wall breaks offers some further insight into the character's motivation. The play's modern twist, through colloquial language, provides the 19th century script with a contemporary angle, proving its endurance against time. The interval passed by blissfully, drinking on the theatre's terrace. With glasses drained, and legs stretched, it was time for the second act to commence. It flew by, with humour and wit I had now grown accustomed to, and the ending capping off the play in a subtly more sombre tone than before, as the consequences of the characters actions all come to light.

"David Bradley asked me to pass on that he absolutely loved your performance tonight, found you hysterically funny from your first line onward."



## Surprising and clever

*The Government Inspector, The Loft Theatre, Leamington, until 15th June*

### REVIEW

BY PETER BUCKROYD

NICOLAI Gogol's satirical play features an opportunistic conman who plays upon the paranoid gullibility of provincial townspeople. To be honest it's a somewhat creaky old play but Nick Le Mesurier's clever adaptation gives it surprising relevance to a modern audience.

Le Mesurier uses modern and colloquial language to bring out the amazingly topical corruption of those in authority in the spheres of local government, law, education, the Post Office, schools and hospitals, all of which we recognise only too well in this time of build-up to a national general election.

Director Matthew Salisbury makes some interesting and effective choices, too. He establishes the play very much as a Ben Jonson-style comedy of humours, making hypocrisy, self-interest and political ambition the vices which need to be unmasked at the end of the play. The playing is therefore stylised and exaggerated with the result that we see the characters' foibles but like none of them. It is also an interesting and effective choice to play Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky as a couple of young affected stooges rather than the middle-aged men in Gogol's original.

The cast is

strong. John Fenner is a delightful bumbling, spluttering director of education, Matthew Salisbury as the Mayor is strong, sturdy and assertive, and Dylan Marshall delightful as the utterly vacuous and sycophantic mannered Dobchinsky. The two women, the Mayor's wife and daughter (Cheryl Laverick and Anna Butcher) are stupidly gullible, coming off badly. There is nothing to redeem them in Gogol's eyes. The servant Osip, however, is given quite a subtle portrayal by Jeremy Heynes. I wasn't quite convinced by the con artist Khelastikov played by Giles Allen-Bowden although his characterisation did emphasise the absurd gullibility of all those he cons. Mark Oram's Tyapkin Tyapkin was completely recognisable as a 2014 political figure on the make and Elaine Freeborn's casting as a female made the contemporary resonances of her role obvious.

As always at The Loft the set designed by Amy Carroll was excellent and delightful to look at as were Helen Brady's costumes.



The decision to have the players not acting sit off stage at tables in the right and left wings was a nice touch and the sound and lighting excellent.