

## THEATER

## World celebrates Russia's 'immortal' Chekhov at 150

MOSCOW: Literature lovers around the world on Friday held celebrations and paid tribute to Anton Chekhov on the 150th birthday of Russia's most universally acclaimed playwright.

Chekhov fans said the author famed for combining a raw emotional writing style with detailed studies of the human condition at the turn of the last century maintains his relevance more than 100 years after his death.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev jetted to Chekhov's hometown of Taganrog in southern Russia, where he described the physician-turned-writer's short stories and plays as "immortal."

Clutching a bouquet of cream roses, the Kremlin chief said we can still learn from the dozens of Chekhov works, which enjoy an enduring universal appeal and have inspired other renowned writers, including James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Though his myriad of short stories are enormously popular in his homeland, it is his theatrical contributions to world drama that have earned Chekhov international fame.

British playwright Top Stoppard and America's David Mamet have both re-worked works by the humble, often bespectacled Chekhov and women revered him for giving them a strong voice by creating complex female characters.

German director Peter Stein, in Moscow for the anniversary, said Chekhov was as important to theater as Greek tragedy and William Shakespeare.

"These are the three basic columns of European theater. Shakespeare reinvented the Greeks for modern times and Chekhov for the 20th century," he told Reuters.

At his snow-covered grave in Moscow's Novodevichy cemetery, where he lies beside



Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev (center, in the foreground) talks to actors from the Chekhov Drama Theater, with a portrait of a prominent Russian writer Anton Chekhov, to mark his 150th birth anniversary in the city of Taganrog Jan. 29, 2010. (Reuters)

his wife, actress Olga Knipper, theater enthusiasts huddled in -20 C (-4 F) temperatures to pay homage to the writer who was born on

January 29, 1860.

"Humanism is a common virtue for all audiences. He (Chekhov) shows the reality of the

human soul," said Bernard Favre d'Arcier, former director of France's Festival d'Avignon. Laying down a wreath, Favre d'Arcier,

who has directed Chekhov plays for years, compared the Russian writer to 17th century French playwright Jean-Baptiste Moliere.

Russia this week launched a nationwide, six-month festival in honor of Chekhov, who lived throughout the Russian empire working as a doctor, including a stint in the Far East island of Sakhalin on the Pacific.

His biographers say it was there, in 1890, as he interviewed prisoners in a penal colony for the census, that he became deeply preoccupied with human suffering.

"He sees us, shockingly, as who we are," Declan Donnellan, co-founder of international theater company Cheek By Jowl, told Reuters. "He doesn't see us through a prism of sentimentality. And that is shocking for us."

The theater world is using the anniversary as an excuse for lavish and dedicated festivals for one of their most loved playwrights, who died after suffering for most of his adult life from tuberculosis, in Germany in 1904 at the age of 44.

He will also debut this year in Swahili in a production in Kenya.

Mexico City will stage, in Spanish, *The Cherry Orchard* and a dramatized version of his novel *The Shooting Party* during its three-day celebration starting Friday, which also has an exhibition and a documentary on the writer.

Several London theatres currently have Chekhov productions on, including *Three Sisters*, a heart-wrenching tale set in a drab provincial town depicting the sisters' longing and desperation following the death of their father.

Beijing and New York are both staging *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov's final play, which describes the lives of a group of aristocrats in the wake of the serfs' liberation. -Reuters

## BOOKS

## Ozzy memoir is ride through rock history

Title: *I Am Ozzy*

Author: Ozzy Osbourne, with Chris Ayres

Publisher: Grand Central Publishing

NEWYORK: *I Am Ozzy* is a "true Hollywood story" in book format - a ride through rock 'n' roll history with a driver saturated in controlled substances. It's Ozzy Osbourne's stumbling, rambling, decadent-beyond-recognition memoir, as over-the-top as the author himself. The book would be heartbreaking if it weren't so hilarious.

This autobiography of the indefatigable Prince of Darkness chronicles the often obscene life and times of John "Ozzy" Osbourne. It follows his winding path to stardom from a meager upbringing in Aston, Birmingham, in Britain, where he lived an unremarkable life in a post-World War II house with his parents and five siblings. His early life was severely troubled. After stints as a mediocre student (he was diagnosed with dyslexia in middle age), a failed day worker and an inept burglar, Osbourne found himself in Winson Green prison. His time behind bars was brief, but it weaned him off petty crime.

Osbourne still itched for stimuli outside the mundane, blue-collar existence that permeated his town. His love for music - the Beatles tapped into his earnest sonic zeal - prompted him to pursue music as a career. Armed with a PA system and ragtag gaggle of local musicians, he began planting the seeds for Black Sabbath, the rock band that would



FILE - The cover image of *I Am Ozzy*.

gain notoriety for occult-themed music and drug-fueled antics. For much of their career, Black Sabbath lived on a diet of groupies, beer and cocaine. The quantity and rapidity of their binges were legendary, and their buffoonery on and off the stage was unsurpassed. Osbourne's life played out like a rock opera. He started his band, married young, had chil-

dren, got divorced young and was fired from Black Sabbath. He then built a solo career; married his second wife, Sharon; had three more children; and continued as a force in rock. He operated in a self-professed pharmacological stupor until he was diagnosed with Parkinson Syndrome in 2005, forcing him to abandon drugs and alcohol.

His story is told in a Dickensian monologue, replete with British colloquialisms and poor grammar, as he relates tales of debilitating drug-induced paranoia, drunken rooftop orgies and driving drunk to the hospital when his first wife was in labor. If you're looking for a fine-tuned, poetic, literary gem, look elsewhere. This book is gritty and raunchy. But while Osbourne's memoir is sometimes painful to read, it's also sidesplittingly funny. The narrative is like a bear trap laced with opium; it hurts, but you soon enjoy it.

Osbourne holds himself to task for his run-ins with the law, not financially providing for his parents when Black Sabbath was signed and nearly killing a priest with hashish baked goods. But he gives himself a pass for other actions, such as the forceful removal of cats from his garage by way of shotgun and countless infidelities during his first marriage.

As a storyteller, Osbourne is like an aging, long-winded sage with a pint on hand, and he's not a writer (the book was dictated). But he can certainly entertain us.

He's been performing for nearly 40 years, and *I Am Ozzy* is an entertaining read.

## MOVIES

## Saint John of Las Vegas no Divine Comedy



FILE - A still from *Saint John of Las Vegas*.

Running time: 1 hr. 25 min.

Rating: R

☆☆☆☆

LOS ANGELES: The deadpan comedy *Saint John of Las Vegas* opens with Steve Buscemi walking into a Vegas convenience store, plopping down an envelope full of cash and asking for a thousand lottery tickets. "Why not?" he asks with a mixture of defiance and despair.

Why not? Well, for starters, there's no lottery in Nevada. It is a small detail, yes, but indicative of a movie that tries so hard to echo Dante's "Inferno" that it neglects to create characters and a story that can hold our interest for even the film's scant 85-minute running time. Buscemi plays John, a guy who, apparently, had a great run of luck in better days but is now confined to a cubicle under the harsh fluorescent lighting of an Albuquerque insurance office. He files claims, logs calls and sort of enjoys some kind of weird office flirtation with Jill (Sarah Silverman), a chirpy co-worker obsessed with smiley faces.

An opportunity for something better arrives when John's nutty boss (Peter Dinklage) sends him and the company's best fraud investigator, Virgil (Romany Malco), on the road to look into a dubious car accident just outside Vegas. John does not want

to go - Vegas did a number on him - but he does not resist too hard, either. Maybe he knows it is time he faced his demons.

But first-time writer-director Hue Rhodes never tries to fill in the blanks about John's past or his present fears and compulsions. He is too eager to send him on a superficial road trip through Oddsville, USA, where John meets a wheelchair-using stripper (Emmanuelle Chriqui), a group of desert nudists and a salvage-yard owner named (groan) Lucypher. None of these encounters are remotely interesting, save for a conversation John has with a tow truck driver (John Cho) who moonlights as a carnival human torch. The Torch's suit has gone haywire, causing him to burst into flames every 20 seconds as he waits for the fuel tank to empty. The Torch does not seem to mind, except that he could really use a smoke.

That scene is such an inspired piece of surrealism that you wonder why Rhodes settles for the mundane for the rest of the movie. Buscemi can do droll desperation with the best of them, but the underdeveloped John remains a cipher throughout the film. Silverman is wasted as the sweet contrast to John's weary fatalism. As a portrait of one man's journey toward dignity, *Saint John* is not bad enough to create its own special circle of hell. As a comedy, though, it's anything but divine. -AP

## Iranian Olympics documentary lacks Kick

Running Time: 1 hr. 21 min.

Rating: NR

☆☆☆☆

PARK CITY, Utah: The subject may be novel, but few will find it worth the running time in "Kick in Iran," a thin documentary about the first Iranian woman to qualify for the Olympic games. Festival programmers may take interest for diversity's sake, but much life beyond that is unlikely. Playing off the obscure song *Big in Japan*, the pic's title seems chosen like much of the footage here: nothing better presented itself.

While Western viewers may appreciate seeing bits of daily life in a society they know little about, the doc isn't well suited by the verite approach, and might have benefited from some straightforward interviews and expository material. Sara Khoshjamil-

Fekri, a slender young woman with a lovely smile and a mean battle cry, is the star of Iran's Taekwondo team, and the doc begins with the news of her Olympic qualification. Filmmaker Fatima Geza Abdollahyan then follows the athlete around as the games approach, occasionally noting the public's reaction - a religious figure calls her entry into the Games "a sin ... prostitution and the beginning of fornication" - while seeing how life differs for female Iranian athletes and their more celebrated male counterparts. Very minor drama crops up when an injury puts Sara's training on hold, forcing her to watch teammates steal the spotlight briefly. But this setback is as under-dramatized as the broader cultural conflicts on tap - and with footage of the fighter's actual bouts amounting to only a couple of minutes, *Kick in Iran* lacks action on both the physical and narrative fronts. -Reuters

## FASHION



A model showcases a creation by Sharad Raghav during the second day of the Bangalore Fashion Week in Bangalore, India, Friday, Jan. 29, 2010. (AP)



A model presents a creation by Pepa Castro during the International Flamenco Fashion Show in the Andalusian capital of Seville in Spain on Jan. 29, 2010. (Reuters)



Indian Bollywood actress Celina Jaitley presents a creation by Archana Kochar during the Source India 2010 Fashion Show in Mumbai on Jan. 28, 2010. (AFP)