

## Taking in *The Two Maples*

by Seth Johnson – April 10, 2014

Baba Yaga, the witchy villain in Evgeny Shvarts' *The Two Maples*, lives in a hut perched atop chicken legs, but this outrageously absurd detail no longer fazes Taylor Galloway. Since he began preparing for his role in the [Butler University Theatre](#) production of the Russian play (which premiered last evening), the sophomore theater major has come to terms with the parallel absurdities found within fairy tales. In his eyes, this chicken legs house is now nothing more than a pumpkin carriage.



*Courtesy Of Butler University Theatre. This production of *The Two Maples* incorporates improvisation into actors' performances.*

"You realize when looking at fairy tales that you knew growing up, that if you were looking at that from a different perspective, from a culture other than your own, than you would think those random things would be very strange too," says Galloway, who will be playing Ivanushka (the youngest son of Vasilisa) in the performance. "Thinking about Cinderella, the pumpkin carriage is also ridiculous, but for some reason to me, the chicken legs house is more ridiculous than the pumpkin simply because I didn't grow up with one."

Now through Sunday, April 13, Butler University Theatre will present *The Two Maples*, coinciding with the university's 2014 [ArtsFest](#). Themed "Fables, Fairy Tales, and Physics," the 14-day series

showcases the complexly fantastic world of fairy tales through a vast array of art forms, including theater, classical music, modern dance, visual arts, and much more.

Directed by Associate Professor of Theatre [Elaina Artemiev](#), who grew up in Russia and remembers seeing the play when she was in elementary school, this updated, contemporary take on Shvarts' endearing Russian tale uses imagination and humor as gateways to underlying themes of hard work, friendship, forgiveness and love.

Making the most of the story's playfully innocent plot, Artemiev has urged her cast of student actors to fully immerse themselves in Shvarts' whimsical world, using the

imagination to assimilate the actors with their roles in the performance.

For example, while fostering Galloway's intercultural realizations, Artemiev has also helped the young actor build upon his skill set through unconventional rehearsal tactics built around imagination and improvisation.



*Courtesy Of Butler University Theatre. Elaina Artemiev directs the Butler ArtsFest production of The Two Maples, a play she remembers from her childhood in Russia.*

"We did a lot of improvisations where we'd be given a general scenario and we'd have to, as our characters, imagine how they would react in various situations,"

Galloway says. "Then, we'd play out various scenes of the script without the lines memorized and just try and recreate how they would behave so that way we weren't just focused on the lines themselves, that we understood the characters' intentions and how they felt about the other characters without just being limited to the specific story itself."

As a result of exploring their characters in uniquely personal ways, improvisation has seeped into Artemiev's *Two Maples* production. She reflects, "I welcome all improvisations that they are able to bring in from themselves." This genuine approach to acting has rubbed off on Allyson Womack, who will be portraying Baba Yaga in Artemiev's production.

"There should be a heightened sense of acting, but it should be truthful and something that the audience can believe," she says. "That you're not just acting in a certain way -- you're actually living in this world."

Through her production, Artemiev ultimately hopes audiences of all ages can experience this recreated fairy tale world in a way that "truthfully exists" and tells something "valuable in a light way."

"Fairy tales return us to our roots, to our childhood -- when we were able not just to look but see, not just to listen but hear," she concludes.