

Russian lessons from a Dutchman in England

YOU'VE heard the one about the man who liked the razor so much that he bought the company. Now try the one about the director who couldn't afford to do the play, so wrote it himself, writes *Tim Palmer*.

That's almost what happened to Maarten Laurens. He is responsible for *Marya*, the latest installment in the King's Head's lunchtime season of classic Russian plays.

After a long struggle to find who owned the rights to the Penguin translation, Laurens was quoted a huge sum which

would have made a large hole in his tiny budget. So he decided to translate it himself.

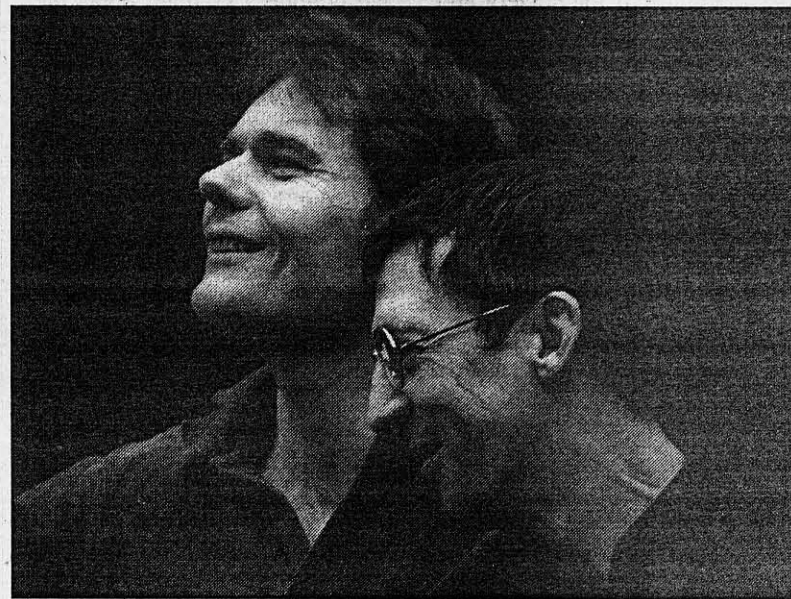
Laurens, a Dutchman, worked at night turning the Russian words into English in time to rehearse them with the cast the following day. And now he has finished it, he is happy to discover that his version is actually much more interesting than the published one, which suffers by transferring every last aspect into English culture.

"I discovered so much more in the Russian version. Lots of the keys and clues to under-

standing the play had been lost in the original translation. The language of the play was old fashioned when he wrote it, and only after a while do you understand why it shouldn't be translated into modern text," he said.

The play follows the fortunes of a group of Russians in the 1920s, trying to adjust to life after the Bolshevik revolution. Written by Isaac Babel, it has only been performed once in this country, and never in Russia. Babel never saw his play produced. He was arrested in 1939 and nothing more was seen or heard of him until his death certificate was delivered to the family 13 years later.

Marya is at the King's Head until April 19 at 1pm daily (not Mondays). Box office: 0171-226 1916.



● Richard Banham and Russell Levy in *Marya*. Pic by Andrea Lioy