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Wednesday, August 8, 1979

Soviet-U.S. Exchange

At some point next spring, the Moscow Art Theater and an American production of "A Chorus Line" will be aboard two ships passing in the night. The Moscow Art Theater will be aboard

a Soviet naval vessel en route to Broadway, and "A Chorus Line" will be on a commercial freighter on its way to Kiev for simultaneous openings on April 1. This exchange is the result of negotiations initiated last spring by Joseph Papp, and is expected to be the first of several Soviet-American theatrical exchanges.

The Moscow Art Theater, which last appeared in New York in 1965, will be here for a month before traveling to Boston and Washington for two-week engagements. The company will open in New York with Chekhov's "Ivanov," starring Oleg Yfremov, whom Mr. Papp calls the Moscow Art Theater's "leading actor." Three other plays — a new production of Chekhov's "The Seagull" and two contemporary works by the late Soviet playwright Vam Pilov — will also be performed here, each for a weeklong run.

On the other side of the exchange, "A Chorus Line" will play in Kiev and Leningrad for two weeks each and Moscow for a month.

"Everything is being done on a quid pro quo basis," Mr. Papp said. "The Russians are insisting on it. Each engagement will last eight weeks, and each company will be the same size — 55 people.

"More people will want to see 'Chorus Line' than will rush to see the Moscow Art Theater. Still, this is a distinguished company, and audiences will be able to get a sense of it in repertory. This is a unique situation."

Mr. Papp, who has been negotiating this exchange privately, has recruited Bernard Jacobs, president of the Shubert Organization, and Roger L. Stevens, head of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, for assistance in raising funds and providing theaters. According to Mr. Papp, Mr. Jacobs will donate one of his Broadway houses — possibly the Lyceum — as well as the Shubert Theater in Boston. "Roger is doing the same thing at the Kennedy Center," Mr.

Papp said. "He is not charging us for the Eisenhower Theater."

The American part of this exchange is expected to cost close to \$1.5 million. Each side will pay for transportation and salaries of its own company. Each side will also provide its visitors with hotel rooms and money for food — \$20 a day for the Russians, 13 rubles a day for the Americans. In addition, each side will keep its own box-office income.

"We're already in the fund-raising campaign," Mr. Papp said. "I'm going for help to Coca-Cola, huge computer firms and the many other big American companies that are involved in the Soviet Union."