

## **Synopsis - *One Left Hour: The Life and Work of Daniil Kharms***

How do we make meaning of art? How do we make meaning of life?

These are the central questions of *One Left Hour*, a 60-minute hyper-theatrical exploration of the life and work of Daniil Kharms.

Kharms (1905-1942) was at the vanguard of the avant-garde movement in the early Soviet Union. His poems, plays, and short prose defy easy categorization, ranging from haunting fable to absurdist joke. In *One Left Hour*, a company of 6 performers attempts to stage selections from his writings in order to chart the course of his life from birth to his untimely death of starvation in a Leningrad insane asylum.

Over the course of their hour, the performers sing, dance, make each other laugh, beat each other up, suffer humiliations, stage revolutions, argue, threaten mutiny, and invent new performances on the spot. By turns highly choreograph and entirely spontaneous, *One Left Hour* is a performance piece that grapples with the politics of realism as a limited, and ultimately authoritarian, form art, while simultaneously struggling with absurdism and its seeming inability to mean anything clear.

In their struggle, they also confront the mystery of Kharms himself: a man who claimed to be apolitical, and yet was arrested by twice Stalinist authorities for creating politically subversive art, a man who feigned insanity in order to avoid being sent to the gulag. Chronic misogynist who claimed to love women, son of a revolutionary hero who claimed to despise the proletariat, absurdist writer who nevertheless claimed a profound relationship with material world, Daniil Kharms, like his writing, resists easy interpretation. Was he an artistic genius or shameful provocateur? Do his works mean anything? Do they have to? Who gets to decide?

Did Kharms have a responsibility to fight tyranny in the Soviet Union? Do we have a responsibility to fight tyranny here? Can we do that with art? Do formal artistic experiments really qualify as meaningful political resistance?

Are we living the right life?