



Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Photo: Reuters

Marquez on stage in Sydney for a song

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A SYDNEY theatremaker thought she had a terrific idea in bringing a short story by the Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez to the stage. Until his agent asked for a \$50,000 fee.

Director Netta Yashchin says she asked permission from the Colombian writer's representatives in Barcelona, Spain, to stage his psychological thriller *I Only Came to Use the Phone*. The request for the large fee came back from his agent, Carmen Balcells.

Yashchin called Balcells and explained that her small production company did not have the money and that the play's short season at a fringe festival meant the company would be lucky to cover its costs.

"Then she said, 'Just do it', and never wanted anything," Yashchin says. "I was ecstatic."

Yashchin does not know if the request went right to Marquez, 84. But, she thinks that because he is an author rather than a playwright, he would not be "lending himself to preciousness".

She originally received permission to stage Marquez's surreal comi-tragedy for the 2008 Adelaide Fringe festival, where it won an award. She recently asked Balcells for permission to stage it in Sydney, which was granted for a small fee because it was for a commercial theatre production.

Yashchin believes that few, if any, people have made theatre from Marquez's work, and plans to invite the author when the play opens in Sydney next month. She hopes to later stage the production overseas.

Marquez's openness to having the work staged freely is a contrast to literary giants who are far more restrictive.

Samuel Beckett's estate is known for ensuring productions of the writer's work follow his directions to the letter before allowing stagings. In 2003, Beckett's nephew threatened legal action to block Belvoir Street Theatre's production of *Waiting for Godot* because it included music.

Edward Albee, who wrote *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, also has a reputation for taking umbrage with productions of his work he deems too interpretative.

On her latest request Yashchin says Balcells "was very open, she wanted a very small amount, relatively speaking, [and] wished us all the best. It was a big surprise for me. I thought it would be more difficult."

I Only Came to Use the Phone will be performed with six actors, including Yashchin. It follows a woman who is on the way to visit relatives when her car breaks down, and she later realises she is in a mental asylum.

***I Only Came to Use the Phone* opens at Darlinghurst Theatre on May 3.**