

# RUSSIAN MAECENAS



June 2020

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP MAGAZINE

Issue 32

With  
Russian  
pages



12+

Undeclared  
by the Siege p. 4

Immersion  
in Music p. 26

United  
by the theatre p. 38





Gazprom transgaz Saint-Petersburg has been supporting the 'Optimists of the Northern Capital. Gazprom Cup', Russia's major series of regattas for children and young people, since 2012. The annual regatta was founded on the initiative of Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller. In 2019, 184 young sportsmen from various sailing schools in Russia took part in the event. They compete on yachts in the 'Optimist' class — models of classic large yachts on which children all over the world learn to sail. And some youngsters for whom the 'Optimists of the Northern Capital. Gazprom Cup' was their first serious competition are now in the Russian national sailing team and win prizes in international competitions.



*Fair Government  
Strong Business  
Prosperous Citizens*

12+

RUSSIAN MAECENAS

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**On the cover:**

Alexander Beggrov. The imperial yacht 'Derzhava' at the New Admiralty.  
1793. Reproduction kindly provided by the State Museum of the History  
of St. Petersburg.

The 'Optimists of the Northern Capital. Gazprom Cup' regatta.  
Photo: Filipp Kovalev.

Welcome!

## I am / We are Special

Bulat Okudzhava used to sing about 'the sacred science  
of hearing one another'. But what if the other person cannot  
hear? Then write to him. But if he also cannot see? Speak  
with your fingers on his palm. There are various ways of  
communicating with a special person, but any technology of  
communication is based on being prepared to put yourself  
in that person's place. When all is said and done, every one  
of us is special.

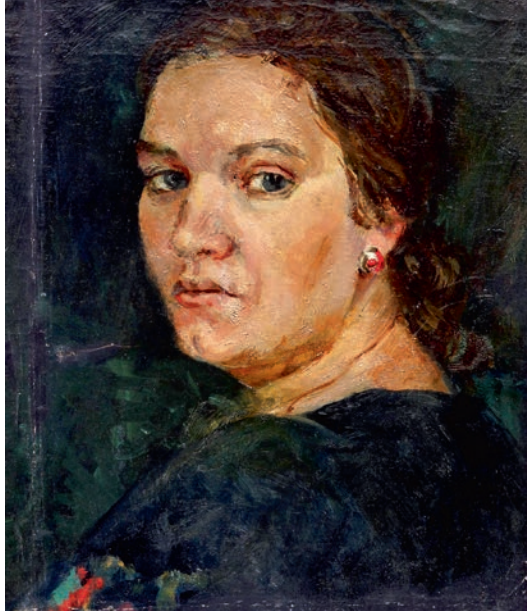
Those were the thoughts and emotions engendered by  
a showing of the French film *Hors normes* (*The Specials*),  
organized by the 'Perspectives' charitable foundation in  
the House of Journalists in St. Petersburg. In the film, two  
superheroes — the Jew Bruno (Vincent Cassel) and the  
Muslim Malik (Reda Kateb) — take care of young people  
with severe autism. The number of their young charges  
keeps increasing — state hospitals will not accept them and  
the dependable Bruno takes on caring for them, trying to  
integrate them into society. In the most hopeless situations  
he is helped, with no superfluous words, by Malik,  
managing to train volunteers at the same time. The two-  
hour film keeps you in suspense to the last minute — for  
the whole time Bruno's 'Voice of the Righteous' association,



which has no licence, is being checked by a state  
commission. You gradually realize that Bruno and Malik,  
with their almost impossible mission, are also special.  
They are trying to prove to the completely normal people  
around them — officials, policemen, waiters and company  
employees — that all men are brothers. Yes, of course,  
tearing off the emergency brake in a Metro carriage is a bad  
thing to do, but a request to 'lay my head on your shoulder'  
or the intrusive question 'What colour are your socks?' are  
actually declarations of love.

And yes, the state should split up psychoneurotic  
homes into smaller units and support inclusive forms of life  
for people with special needs: day centres, accompanied  
accommodation, encouraging those who are setting them  
up — this trend is taking shape in Russia, but it is, alas, too  
early to talk about society agreeing to accept specials as  
equals. And discussion of the film showed that much still  
remains to be done. On one point the participants were  
unanimous: everybody should see this film.

*Arkady Sosnov,  
Editor-in-Chief of Russian Maecenas*



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**‘It is a principle of the foundation that it does not cease collaborating with those it has helped, albeit on only one occasion... We try as hard as we can not to depart from that principle. For that reason, we are sometimes obliged to decline effective one-off promotions, but we do not stop looking for interesting projects for the future. That is why the foundation’s plans include charitable programmes with both long-established and new partners’**

*Gennady YAVNIK,  
General Director of the Konstantinovsky International  
Charitable Foundation / p. 17*



# Undefeated by the Siege

ELENA MARTTILA'S ART AND DEVOTION TO HER VOCATION HELPED HER TO SURVIVE THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD

Ksenia AFONINA. Photos from Elena Marttila's family archive



Self-Portrait. 1936. Paper, watercolour.

During the war, poster art was one of the most widespread types of artistic expression. Every day in the besieged city of Leningrad members of the *Boevoy Karandash* and *Okna TASS* associations produced posters and drawings, which, along with regular radio broadcasts, were the main source of news for the city's residents when they were cut off from the outside world. Young artists were also working in Leningrad at the time. They did not belong to any state structure and were therefore free of official restraints. Although their works were rarely displayed in public, they helped the artists to survive in the appalling conditions.

One of those young artists was Elena Marttila. She survived the severest winter of 1941/1942 and created a series of unique drawings that tell her own personal history of the siege. Elena celebrated her 97<sup>th</sup> birthday this January, but her memories and images of those days have never dimmed, and we can now tap into

those memories via the works from her siege series. They were shown in the exhibition 'Dedicated to Leningrad under Siege' in the Artists' Union and in the Russian College of Traditional Culture in St. Petersburg in January and February.

Elena Marttila was born in Petrograd on 6 January 1923. Her father Oskar was a military cadet from the Finnish town of Kotka and her mother Evdokia was a skilled worker at the Kozitsky factory. Elena started painting in her early childhood when her father bought the little girl her first set of paints. She sketched, modelled and constructed installations from anything that came to hand, including snow, sand and stones. At the age of eleven she took part in the first All-Russian competition for young talents and was admitted to the art school under the auspices of the All-Russian Academy of Arts. Tragedy struck in 1937 when her father was arrested and shot a year later (he was rehabilitated in 1988).





In the Leningrad Art School.  
1941–42.  
Engraving on cardboard.

Abode of a siege victim.  
1941–42.  
Engraving on cardboard.

Tanya alone.  
Autolithograph from the series  
'Leningraders'. 1941–42.

Elena graduated from the art school on 20 June 1941 and was preparing to enter the Academy, but the war disrupted her plans. Instead of taking her entrance exams, she attended Red Cross classes for nurses. She was determined to go to the front, but was obliged to remain in the city on account of her poor health. During the siege, she worked as a medical orderly and a nurse at the children's hospital, helped to evacuate children and, while she still had the strength, studied at the Valentin Serov Art School in Tavricheskaya Street — the only art school that remained open during the war. Yan Shablovsky, the head of the school, assembled the young artists and students who had remained in the city and turned the school into an oasis of life and hope.

The artists and students were incredibly lucky: they received the increased bread rations allocated to workers and that saved many of the school's regular attendees from starvation. Elena lat-

er recalled: '...when we finally reached the school on foot from various places in the city, saw that it was undamaged and that Yan Shablovsky was still there, we realized we were wanted and would be cared for. We believed that all this was temporary... Beautiful rooms, a marble staircase, stained glass windows, mirrors and statues awaited us.' The students took drawing classes and studied art history. And they followed the advice of their teachers: 'always have a pencil in your hand and record your impressions on paper, so as to tell people about it afterwards'. In this way, the teachers forced their exhausted students to think about the future.

When winter arrived, Elena, her mother and two other families moved into the kitchen — it was the warmest and safest room in their communal flat, as it had no windows. However, after a bomb fell on the building, the homeless families had to find another refuge. That is how they survived, moving from place to place. The de-





## Memories

spair and horrors of that time could not but be reflected in Elena Marttila's drawings. One evening, on her way home from the school, which she steadfastly continued to attend despite the long walk (three hours each way), Elena came across a dead body lying in the snow. When she got home, she made a rough sketch of what she had seen. The drawing later became the basis for 'Crossroads'.

Elena was growing weaker by the day and frequently lost consciousness from hunger. When she was coming round after one of these fainting fits, she heard her neighbours telling her mother that Elena was unlikely to survive the winter. This made her unbearably sorry for her mother. One evening in February 1942, Elena sensed that her strength was failing and that she would probably not survive the night. She decided not to go to bed, but began painting a self-portrait instead. Here is what she wrote in her diary: 'If I have to die, I will die as an artist — not in bed, but with a brush in my hand.' She studied her facial features intently by the dim light of a self-made oil lamp. 'I took a sheet of paper and a brush, looked at myself in a little mirror and decided to paint what I saw. The model was there in front of me and I painted... Suddenly, I lifted my head and saw a weak ray of light coming through the slats in the blind. It was already morning — the morning of a day I had not expected to see. I had won! I had overcome death and had not submitted to Hitler's order to exterminate everyone in Leningrad. I realized that I had not died and that now I would not die, but live — I felt that with every cell of my emaciated body and it gave me strength... I became calm and cheerful. The only bread that saved me was my work and my belief.'

Elena was supported only by her art and care for her mother. In April 1942 her mother suffered severe shell-shock and her daughter had to accompany her on evacuation to Mordovia. Elena wrote in her diary: 'I did not want to leave Leningrad, but af-







ter her shell-shock my mother was like a helpless child. She could not even dress herself and was afraid of everything. It was as if she had forgotten how to live. I told her that from now on I would be her mother and she my daughter. She was glad — I could see that by the look of gratitude in her eyes. I was now an adult and was responsible for my mother and our neighbours. We filled in all the forms for the evacuation. Elena's mother and her neighbours with their small children left the city on a lorry across Lake Ladoga — it was the last group to be evacuated on the Road of Life in the spring of 1942. The ice had already started to melt and the ten-hundredweight trucks were almost floating, trying to avoid the shells raining down on them.

Evacuation was yet another ordeal for the refugees. In Mor-dovia, Elena — a city girl who was unaccustomed to hard physical labour — worked on a farm, ploughing fields and felling tim-

ber, and then had to care for her mother when she returned home. Seeing the emaciated bodies and prematurely aged faces of the evacuees from Leningrad, the local residents could not help feeling sympathetic. They also worked indefatigably and were close to starvation themselves. Finding themselves in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment, many of the evacuees endeavoured to return home. Some of them managed to do so after the siege was partially lifted in 1943. At her first opportunity, after receiving an invitation from the art school, Elena and her mother also returned to Leningrad, back to their room on Vasilevsky Island. In 1944 she drew a sketch for a portrait of Dmitry Shostakovich in the Leningrad Philharmonic Hall during a performance of his celebrated 7th Symphony.

After the war, Elena graduated from the art school with distinction and entered the faculty of graphic art at the Academy of

Crossroads. 1942.  
Engraving on cardboard.

Crossing Lake Ladoga.  
13 April 1942.  
Autolithograph.

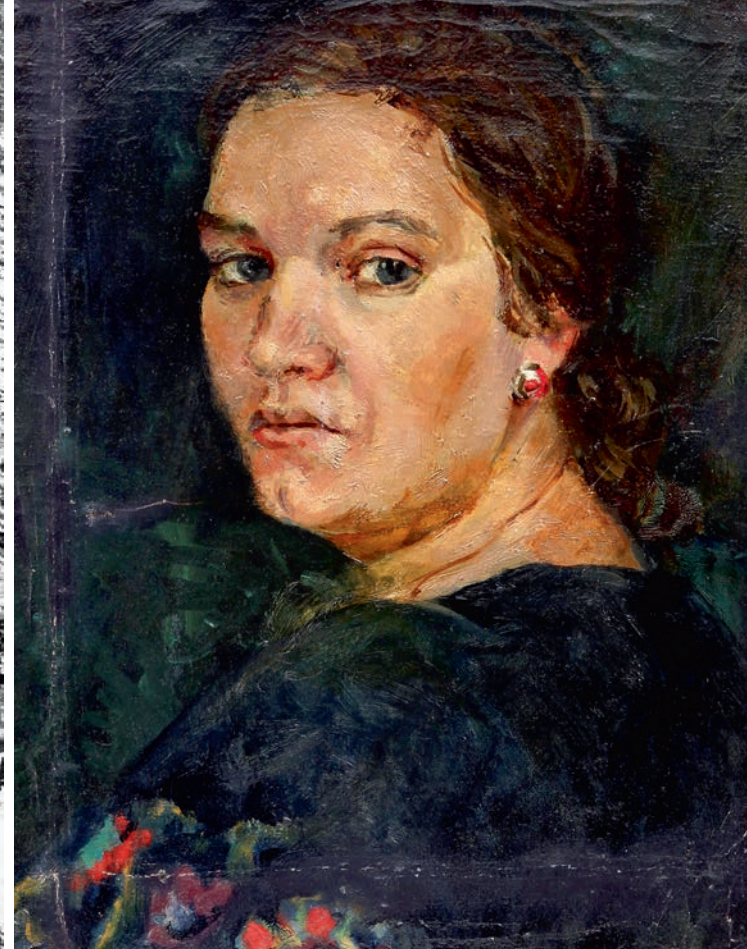
**Page 6:**  
Self-Portrait (facing death).  
February 1942.  
Paper, watercolour.



Leningrad Woman on Duty.  
April 1942.  
Engraving on cardboard.

Self-Portrait.  
1965. Canvas, oil.

The Leningrad Madonna.  
1942 (1990).  
Engraving on cardboard.



Dmitry Shostakovich.  
1944. Paper, charcoal.

Arts, but shortly afterwards decided to abandon her studies and find work. This was partly because she could not accept the precepts of socialist realism and partly because her family was in desperate need of money.

Elena designed posters, painted theatrical scenery and produced shows for the puppet theatre at the Pioneer Palace. She wrote and designed more than fifty theatre and puppet shows, acting as director, stage and costume designer. At the same time, she began teaching: at her former school, at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute and at the art studio of the Polytechnic Institute.

For many years, Elena was looking for the most appropriate way of reviving her drawings from the time of the siege and using them to describe what the people of Leningrad had endured. She

studied the technique of engraving on cardboard and realized that the best way of achieving her aim was with a combination of graphic art and painting, a method that most accurately conveyed what she had seen with her own eyes. The black-and-white drawings have no defined edges and no sharp colour contrasts — the objects seem almost blurred, just as they would have been perceived by the exhausted residents of Leningrad.

In the early 1980s, at an exhibition to mark Victory Day, Elena overheard a conversation between two women who had also survived the siege. They were discussing her *Leningrad Woman on Duty* (april 1942), which depicted a woman with a child resting his head on her chest, sheltering him from air raids. They called this work 'The Leningrad Madonna' or 'Bereginya' ('The Protectress'),





seeing it as a dedication to all the mothers who had protected their children during the siege.

Based on her impressions from this conversation that she had chanced to hear, Elena decided to refine the drawing in order to reinforce these associations. Nearly thirty years later, it took on new meaning and became a symbol of self-sacrifice and love. The mother is protecting her sleeping child from calamities and disasters, wrapping him in her shawl and preserving a precious moment of peace for him. She is standing at the entrance to a dark courtyard, and in the background can be seen a pavement, a lamp-post and the façade of a neighbouring building with more archways — typical features of Leningrad architecture. The 'Madonna' reflects not only the enormous suffering endured by Leningrad

residents, but also the love and belief that helped them to survive the dreadful ordeal.

Elena was strongly recommended to destroy her works after the war, as they deviated too much from the official version of the siege depicted on posters. For the same reason she was not accepted as a member of the Leningrad branch of the USSR Artists' Union. The explanation for her refusal was that her works did not conform to ideological standards. She became a member of the organization only in 1981. Exhibitions of Elena Marttila's works have been staged not only in Russia but also in Britain, Germany and France.

Elena now lives in Kotka in Finland, where her father was born. She still has a passionate love for life, art and her native Leningrad, with which her life and work are forever linked.

*'I felt the need to draw at an early age and it became my vocation in life, inspired me, gave me strength and helped me to survive the terrible hardships of the siege of Leningrad. Later generations cannot even imagine what we went through. It is better that way, of course, but we also have no right to forget how it was, so that it will never happen again. We must remember the people who remained faithful to common human values in their torment and by their example conveyed a message of determination, devotion, love, goodness, compassion and self-sacrifice for future generations'.*

*Elena MARTTILA  
to readers of Russian Maecenas.  
Kotka, 27 January 2020.*



# Thank you for your Constancy!

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THE KONSTANTINOVSKY INTERNATIONAL CHARITABLE FOUNDATION IS HELPING PARTNERS IN LONG-TERM PROJECTS  
Sergey TEPLOV. Photos: the archives of the Konstantinovsky Foundation, the Elena Obraztsova Cultural Centre, the 'Parents' Bridge' Foundation,  
the 'Keeping the Peace' Festival and the Dmitry Likhachev Foundation



The scope of the Konstantinovsky Foundation's programmes is impressive: preserving and reconstructing cultural and historical heritage, promoting St. Petersburg as the historical, cultural and spiritual centre of Russia, restoring and reconstructing Russian cultural monuments, supporting educational, scientific, sporting and socially important projects. Scope is unarguably a significant dimension, but consistency and permanence in each of the foundation's chosen projects is of no less importance. It could explain its relationship with its partners simply as: 'There is only one Konstantinovsky and there are many of you; we have helped you, now you help yourselves...'. However, what sets the foundation apart is that it does not desert its friends even when its own circumstances are difficult. Indeed, how could it withdraw support for veterans' organi-



## Effective Practice



zations, for the 'Parents' Bridge' Foundation with its programmes to place orphaned children in families, or for the Kronstadt Naval Cadet Corps, where remarkable lads are gaining knowledge and strength as they become adults?..

In almost twenty years, the Konstantinovsky Foundation (created on 16 January 2001) has acquired several permanent partners of this type. We thought it would be interesting to look at its collaboration with charities from their own standpoint.

### IN THE STEPS OF PETER THE GREAT

'Non-commercial, non-governmental organizations are not seeking to make a profit and are not subject to bureaucracy when selecting their projects', reflects Oleg Leikind, Deputy Director



of the Dmitry Likhachev Foundation. 'The price for this "luxury" is unstable financing and dependence on grants, subsidies, fortuitous contracts and donations. These organizations' main strategy for survival is to search for philanthropists who are prepared to allocate funds to particular activities without dictating how that money should be used. We have been lucky — since 2007, one of our most substantial and reliable partners, which shares our values, has been the Konstantinovsky Foundation.'

A number of long-term scientific-educational programmes have been implemented in that time thanks to the Konstantinovsky Foundation. They are very varied in character: research projects, conferences, round-table discussions and exhibitions and publications based on their results. The programmes are aimed at Russian

Cadets from Kronstadt supported by the Konstantinovsky Foundation — guests at Maecenas Day 2014 in the Hermitage Theatre.

Congress of Petrine Cities. On the presidium (left to right): Hermitage General Director Mikhail Piotrovsky, Daniil Granin, Alla Manilova, Russian Deputy Minister of Culture, Alexander Kobak, Director of the Likhachev Foundation. 2009.

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The Konstantinovsky Palace.





Unveiling of the memorial plaque to Marc Chagall. 2014.

The Petrine Congress. 2009.



The two-volume biographical dictionary 'Russian Artists Abroad: The First and Second Waves of Emigration'.

and foreign historians, art experts, museum staff, librarians and archivists. The most outstanding of them is 'In the Steps of Peter the Great', initiated by Daniil Granin, the former Chairman of the Likhachev Foundation, encompassing dozens of towns and cities in Russia and abroad connected with Peter. The first international history congress, organized in 2007 with the support of the Konstantinovsky Foundation, was entitled the Congress of Petrine Cities. There have been thirteen annual congresses since then; in 2020, congresses will be held in St. Petersburg and Brussels.

The project includes an extensive publishing programme that now numbers around forty books. The highlight will be the publication of an encyclopaedia entitled *Collection of Monuments to Peter in Russia* in 2022, the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peter the Great's birth. It will feature, in one publication, descriptions of a thousand monuments, memorial plaques and insignia, fortifications and engineering structures, religious and secular buildings — all the places that preserve the memory of the emperor and his closest associates. It

will be the cumulative effect of a long-term partnership with those of a similar persuasion.

Another programme that has enjoyed the permanent support of the Konstantinovsky Foundation is 'The Artistic Legacy of Russians Abroad'. The results of many years' work have been the Internet site 'Fine Art and Architecture of Russians Abroad', followed in 2019 by the publication of the two-volume biographical dictionary 'Russian Artists Abroad: the First and Second Waves of Emigration', including biographies of 1,800 artists.

The endeavour to promote the phenomenon of St. Petersburg also brings the two foundations closer together. Daniil Granin was not only a chronicler of the siege of Leningrad (he organized one of the first international conferences on the subject), but also headed the editorial board of the *Encyclopaedia of St. Petersburg* (2006), which the Konstantinovsky Foundation helped to develop into a major Internet portal ([www.encspb.ru](http://www.encspb.ru)). In the last decade, several memorial plaques to prominent St. Petersburg cultural and sci-



## Effective Practice

entific figures have been installed on the initiative of the Likhachev Foundation with the support of its partners — to the historian Sergey Platonov (2008), the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (2009) and the artist Marc Chagall (2014). Symbolically, a plaque in memory of Daniil Granin was added in January 2019.

### FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE

The 'Parents' Bridge' Public Charitable Foundation in St. Petersburg, whose motto is 'Children Should Live in a Family', is thirty years old, for the last twelve of which it has been supported by the Konstantinovsky Foundation. Executive Director Galina Anisiforova explained what this means for 'Parents' Bridge'.

Their two key programmes receive regular support: 'From Despair to Hope' (helping families with their own children to prevent them from giving them up) and 'Angels with Broken Wings' (preparing families to adopt children and helping families with adopted children). The first programme consists of monitoring families to establish those of high risk — every year, at least a hundred families with small children in difficult circumstances call the foundation's round-the clock hot line (921 4008). The next step is comprehensive support, including group art therapy sessions and individual consultations with a psychologist. How can one convey in words the painstaking work of enthusiasts who investigate domestic conflicts down to the smallest details and chat to families, knowing that the future of other people, who have become close friends, depends directly on them?..

'We do all we can to keep a family together, drawing on the resources of various organizations to minimize the risk of a child being parted from its family', says Galina Anisiforova. 'When a mother is alone with her problems, we help her to deal with them, taking some of the burden on ourselves. With the money we receive from the Konstantinovsky Foundation we purchase items of personal hygiene for children, medicaments, baby food and educa-



In 'The House of Hope'.

The 'Parents' Bridge' Foundation. Group sessions with adopted and fostered children.





New Year party for wards of the 'Parents' Bridge' Foundation in the Elena Obraztsova Cultural Centre.

tional games and hold individual and group training sessions. We give them a little ray of hope.'

The specialists at 'Parents' Bridge' aim to prevent mothers from rejecting their babies 'in advance', while they are still in the maternity ward. As a result, dozens of newborn babies have remained in families. It goes without saying that the specialists work in close contact with the relevant committees, social protection and health institutions. Besides that, in 2018 a temporary refuge for mothers with small children entitled 'The House of Hope' opened in Pavlovsk on the initiative of 'Parents' Bridge', supported by a presidential grant. The Konstantinovskiy Foundation helps to provide them with everything they need, pays for the services of psychologists in crisis situations and monitors the families after they leave the centre.

Galina Anisiforova, like Oleg Leikind, remarks on the mutual trust and honesty in her relations with the Konstantinovskiy Foun-

dation: it supports partnership programmes, enabling partners to allocate funds to a particular project. This also applies to 'Angels with Broken Wings', which is aimed at preparing prospective adoptive parents for the arrival of a new member of the family, including at special schools for the purpose. Those who complete the course are awarded a state certificate and a socio-psychological report, which are forwarded to wardship and guardianship bodies. The graduates then pass into a monitoring programme run by the specialists at 'Parents' Bridge'. In the years it has been collaborating with the Konstantinovskiy Foundation, over a hundred mothers and fathers who have received more than fifty children into their families have completed this course. Over fifty parents are prepared on an individual basis.

It is important that participants in the programme do not feel that they are on their own and can share the emotions and little secrets of bringing up adopted children with other families in similar situations. So a combined leisure programme is organized for them, including visits to cultural events, training sessions with elements of art therapy on early socializing and on the prevention of learning difficulties. The Konstantinovskiy Foundation is also supporting this venture. Since 2010, the foundation has allocated funds for sweet New Year presents for the families it supports, and has recently started paying for New Year parties for up to two hundred children, parents, adoptive and foster parents.

Galina Anisiforova says that Gennady Yavnik, the General Director of the Konstantinovskiy Foundation, ensures that these parties are held in the best classical traditions, including in the Konstantinovskiy Palace. 'Parents' Bridge' also receives handsome support from another partner of the Konstantinovskiy Foundation — the Elena Obraztsova Cultural Centre. For example, in 2018 it invited problem families to a concert in the Presi-





## Effective Practice



dential Library under the aegis of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, featuring the outstanding musicians Sergey Roldugin, Vladimir Galouzine and Natalya Timchenko.

### FILLING HEARTS WITH MUSIC

The foundation's first project was the restoration of the Konstantinovsky Palace and Park Complex at Strelna (the Palace of Congresses). Shortly after the complex opened in May 2003, one of the palace's great traditions was revived: musical evenings. In the 19th century, great musicians such as Johann Strauss, Anton Rubinstein and Mily Balakirev took part in these soirees. Since 2004, the Konstantinovsky Foundation has been staging classical music concerts in partnership with the 'Palaces of St. Petersburg' International Music Festival. In combination with the unique interiors, the concerts enable the audience to feel the spirit of the old days and to enjoy great music skilfully performed.



During the fifteen years of 'Musical Seasons in the Konstantinovsky Palace', guest artists have included Dmitry Khvorostovsky, Konstantin Orbelian, Giuseppe Sabbatini, Dinara Alieva, Andrea Morricone, the highly popular guitarist Dmitry Illarionov, La Scala soloist Chiara Taiggi, saxophonist Federico Mondelci, actors Georgy Taratorkin and Nikolay Burov... The highlight of one of the evenings was a performance on the 'Francesco' violin made by Antonio Stradivari.

'Besides the popularization of classical music, we also develop children's musicianship', says Honoured Artist of Russia Maria Safaryants, the festival's Artistic Director. 'Appearing in our programmes is an invaluable school of concert performance and experience for young talents. The Konstantinovsky Foundation fully shares the concept of 'Musical Seasons...', which is confirmation of the harmony of our partnership.'

The Konstantinovsky Foundation has a special relationship with the Elena Obraztsova Cultural Centre. It originated because

*The 'Musical Seasons in the Konstantinovsky Palace' link the glittering past of the Grand Prince's residence with the grand current Palace of Congresses complex.*

Nikolay Burov speaking.

Gennady Yavnik, conductor Fabio Mastrangelo, Elena Obraztsova.





'We Perform a Fairytale' — social project of the Elena Obraztsova Cultural Centre featuring actors from the 'Golden Key' Children's Musical Theatre.

'To Your Soul, Elena...' — tribute concert in St. Isaac's Cathedral.

Elena Obraztsova was a good friend of Gennady Yavnik and highly appreciated the foundation's mission. The foundation took an active part in the restoration of the Centre's premises at 65 Nevsky Prospekt. Nowadays, almost all the Centre's programmes are supported by its faithful philanthropists. First and foremost is the Second 'Tribute to Elena Obraztsova' Music Festival (January to October 2020), whose programme includes a wealth of events: training sessions, competitions for junior, young and already established singers, schools for vocalists and accompanists aimed at preserving the heritage of Russia — the life and work of the great opera singer.

Not without reason did the Centre's Director Irina Chernova preface the tribute concert 'To Your Soul, Elena...' in St. Isaac's Cathedral (the soloists were prize-winners in various years at the Elena Obraztsova International Competition for

Young Opera Singers) with words of sincere gratitude to the Konstantinovsky Foundation.

She considers their most important joint achievement to be 'We Perform a Fairytale,' a social project featuring actors from the 'Golden Key' Children's Musical Theatre, founded in memory of Elena Obraztsova. Every six weeks for the last three years the little wards of 'Parents' Bridge' have been coming to 65 Nevsky Prospekt, where children of their own age and actors from the city's musical theatres draw them into interactive participation through songs and dances, helping them to express themselves as personalities.

The partnership cycle is complete, but we cannot fail to mention the foundation's support for another musical initiative: the 'Keeping the Peace' Festival (2019). The project of People's Artist of the USSR Vladimir Fedoseev, who as a child experienced the ordeal of the siege of Leningrad, gave the audience the opportunity





'Keeping the Peace' Festival.  
Maestro Vladimir Fedoseev.

Gennady Yavnik sets out the principles  
of the Konstantinovsky Foundation.



to hear rarely performed works by composers from the Northern Capital played by the Tchaikovsky State Academic Symphony Orchestra (Moscow). The festival, dedicated to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lifting of the siege, was also timed to coincide with the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the births of Valery Gavrilin and Boris Tischenko.

The programme included music about war and peace by Dmitry Shostakovich, Sergey Prokofiev, Valery Gavrilin and Boris Tischenko. Maestro Fedoseev also conducted the world premiere of *A Leningrad Diary*, an oratorio-novel based on the texts of Olga Bergholz. The words of the muse of Leningrad that are carved in granite on the Piskarevskoye Memorial had been set to music for the first time by the young St. Petersburg composer Anton Lubchenko.

'The manuscript score of *A Leningrad Diary* is now in the Museum of the Defence and Siege of Leningrad, and a concert recording of the work will be issued on vinyl in the year of the 75<sup>th</sup> an-

niversary of the Great Victory', says Darya Evseeva, the curator of the festival.

Typically, all the people we talked to look to the future with confidence and hope for the continued favour of the Konstantinovsky Foundation. The foundation's activities in the last nineteen years give them cause for optimism. But what of tomorrow?

'It is a principle of the foundation that it does not cease collaborating with those it has helped, albeit on only one occasion', says Gennady Yavnik, the foundation's General Director. 'Of course we do not have unlimited possibilities, but we try as hard as we can not to depart from that principle. For that reason, we are sometimes obliged to decline effective one-off promotions, but we do not stop looking for interesting projects for the future. That is why the foundation's plans include charitable programmes with both long-established and new partners'



# Contemplating at the faces of an era

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WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM AN OLD ALBUM IN THE HISTORY MUSEUM OF THE PETER THE GREAT POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Roman PANOV, Head of the St. Petersburg Polytechnic University's History Museum. Photos: Polytechnic University Media Centre, archive of the History Museum



A few years ago, the Polytechnic University's History Museum had an amazing slice of luck: it managed to purchase the album of Professor Ivan Meschersky (1859–1935) from a private collector.

The album's first owner was an extraordinary man. He graduated from the Physics and Mathematics Faculty of St. Petersburg University in 1882, having studied with the prominent mathematician Pyotr Chebyshev. From 1890, he was a Visiting Assistant Professor at the university and a lecturer at the Higher Courses for Women. From 1902 to the end of his days, he was Professor in the Department of Theoretical Mechanics at St. Petersburg, also serving as Acting Director from 1907 to 1908. He formulated the equation of motion of a point of variable mass and wrote a textbook of problems in theoretical mechanics that was reprinted over fifty times and translated into dozens of languages. And judging by the dedi-

catory inscriptions on the photographs in the album, he was also a favourite teacher with several generations of students. Not surprisingly, many of them taught at their *alma mater* after graduation.

Every album, even not particularly old ones, contain secrets — especially those with portraits. Who are these people looking out at us from the distant past? How did their lives pan out? Who took the photographs? Sometimes the answers to these questions are in plain sight, but even then they have a hidden meaning. As you leaf through the pages, you can literally feel the material of history woven from amazing biographies and destinies; threads from the past stretch into the present day when you see the faces of the founders of schools of science and dynasties that are still represented at the Polytechnic University. That is why this album is an invaluable museum treasure.



## Heritage

There are around two hundred museums in St. Petersburg, but ours is special: the collection not only describes the history of the university, but also the development of science and technology in Russia. There are now 33,000 students at the university and they can all visit museum while they are studying here, attend lectures about the foundation of the university and its role in progress of science and technology in Russia and the world as a whole. It also makes them think about those who have studied and taught here.

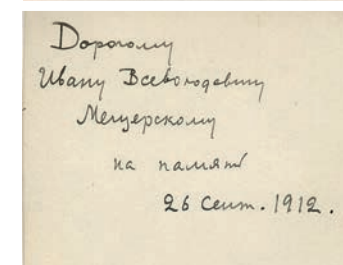
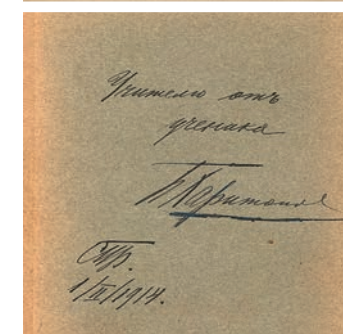
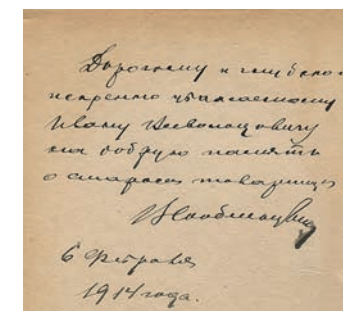
The museum is the same age as the Polytechnic University itself, which means it is over 120 years old. Originally, three museum collections were envisaged: samples of commodities, marine and geological-mineral displays. They complemented the educational process and took up about 8 % of the institute's buildings. By 1924, there were museums in almost every faculty of the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute. After the institute was reformed in 1930, most of the museums' exhibits were transferred to the



The Polytechnic Institute's  
Commodities Museum.

Professor Ivan Meschersky,  
the album's compiler  
and first owner.

Dedicatory inscriptions and  
photographs from  
Meschersky's album.



branch institutes that were created. Only the mineralogical and electro-technical museums remained on the premises of the Polytechnic (Industrial) Institute. The History Museum of the Kalin-in Leningrad Polytechnic Institute was created in 1976. In 1985 it was renamed the Historical-Technical Museum, and since 2019 its title has been the History Museum of the Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University.

The history of the institute/university consists of the deeds of those who have worked here. We want to know as much as possible about them, see their faces, their clothes and their posture. The acquisition of the album has revealed a new layer of everyday life before the revolution, not only in the Polytechnic Institute and St. Petersburg, but also in Russia as a whole. Needless to say, the time before that cataclysmic event is of particular interest to researchers.





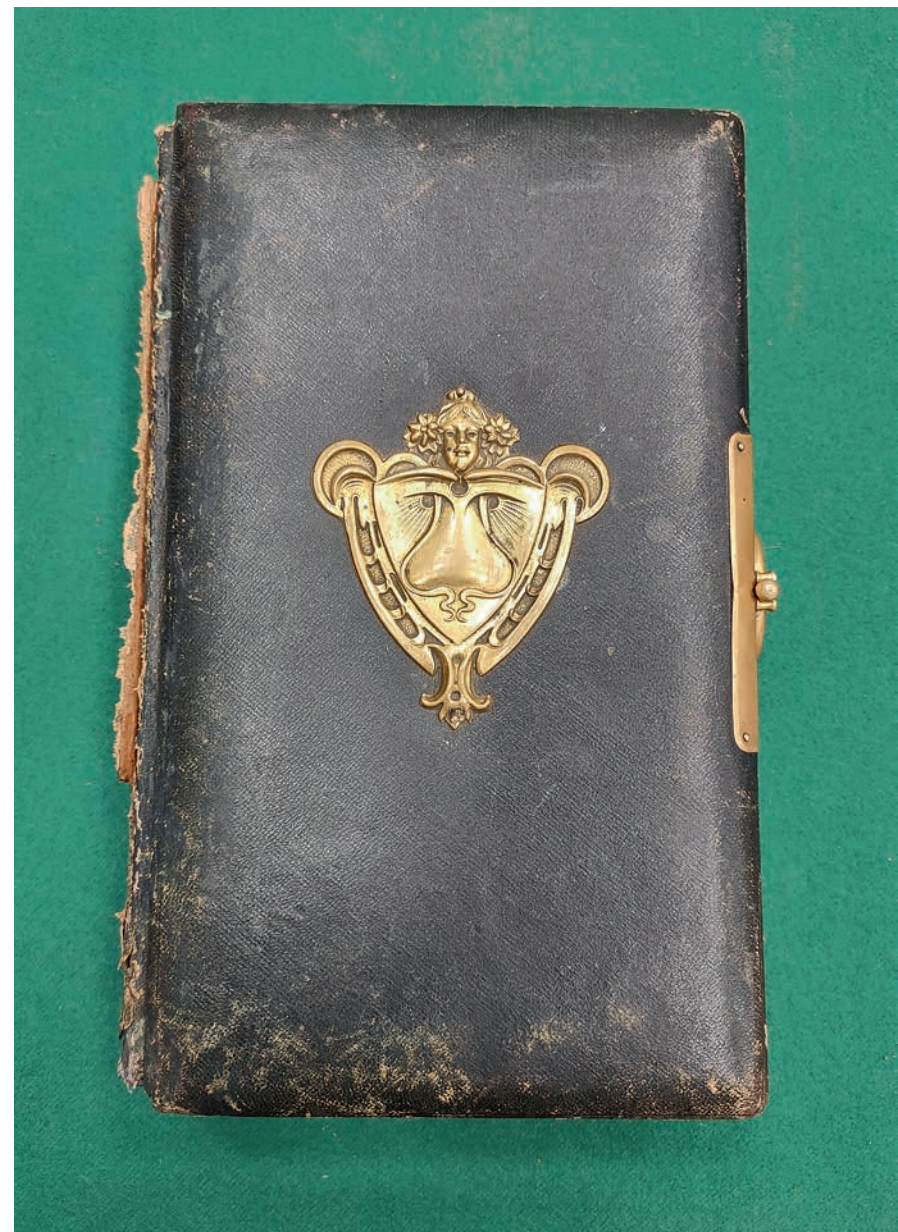
Professor Vladimir Smelov was the first to elaborate the 'portrait theme'.

Ivan Meschersky's album in the Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University History Museum.

The museum began a systematic search for portraits of the old teaching staff of the Polytechnic Institute (then, as now, named after Emperor Peter the Great) over 25 years ago. The subject was painstakingly elaborated by one of the museum's staff — Vladimir Smelov (1936–2014), Professor of the Faculty of Engineering and Construction. Thanks to him and his colleagues, the gallery of pre-revolutionary Polytechnic professors now numbers over a hundred portraits, discovered both in our university and in other museums and private collections.

The gallery includes 39 visiting card-portraits of professors and graduates of the St. Petersburg (Petrograd) Polytechnic Institute from Ivan Meschersky's album. The photographs were taken between 1914 and 1921 in famous studios in St. Petersburg — those of Karl Bulla, Alexander Otsup, Mark Kadyson and 'Reissert und Fliege'. The most popular studio, because of its proximity to the institute, was that of Kazimir Labuza at 29–31 2<sup>nd</sup> Murinsky Prospekt (six of the portraits were taken there). There is no doubt that Professor Meschersky himself visited Labuza's studio — it may be where he bought the album. The album is in the classic format of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: of relatively small dimensions (27x16.5x5 cm), a green leatherine cover (as though chosen specially in the colour of the Polytechnic students' cap-bands), Greek-style brass décor...

What happened to the album in the late 1930s after Meschersky's death? How did it survive the siege of Leningrad? Where was it before 2016? As yet we do not know: the relic has returned from non-existence to the present day, when family albums (and the Polytechnic is a family) are a lost tradition, though they are symbols of times immemorial. Albums are no longer in fashion with the youth of today, who keep their photographs in social networks and clouds. However, our exhibit superbly conveys the spirit of splendid St. Petersburg and enables one to study the city's intellectual elite.





## Heritage



Among those who gave Meschersky their photograph cards were Prince Andrey Gagarin, the first director of the Polytechnic Institute, and the first deans — Franz Levinson-Lessing, Mikhail Shatelen, Konstantin Boklevsky, Alexander Radzig and Sergey Druzhinin.

It is striking that remarkable humanitarian professors lectured in a technological institute — historians, philosophers, sociologists, law experts, economists, statisticians Pyotr Struve and Mikhail Bernatsky (a minister in the Provisional Government), Ivan Grevs and Lev Karsavin, Maxim Kovalevsky and Nikolay Timashev, Vladimir Den and Alexander Chuprov. There were also, of course, specialists in natural science and technology disciplines: Viktor Stanevich and Vladimir Skobeltsyn, Nikolay Kurnakov

and Alexey Lomshakov, Vladimir Mitkevich and Nikolay Savvin (he headed the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the Provisional Government). They all feature in the album.

Today the university's governing body concentrates on training intellectual engineers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with all-round knowledge and high moral qualities. As can be seen, this aim has a powerful historical basis.

Earlier this year, with the financial support of graduates of the Polytechnic University, it was possible to purchase ten more photographs that had not been sold by the album's owner in 2016. One experiences a tremulous feeling when viewing a previously unknown portrait, only one copy of which exists, of the writer Evgeny Zamyatin (1884–1937). In 1902, Zamyatin was one of

Portraits from the album  
acquired in 2016:

Mikhail Shatelen.

Ivan Ivano.

Vladimir Mitkevich.

Alexander Radzig.





Evgeny Zamyatin and his dean, Konstantin Boklevsky.



the first 26 students of the Polytechnic Institute's shipbuilding department. His tutors included Professors Meschersky, Skobel'syn and Georgy Pio-Ulsky, whose portrait has also been purchased in 2020. So the album contains biographies of both teachers and students.

Evgeny Zamyatin retained extraordinarily vivid memories of his summer naval practical, which Konstantin Boklevsky, Dean of the Department, had arranged for his students: "The summer of 1905 was particularly blue, colourful and packed with people and incidents. I did my practice on the steamship 'Rossiya', sailing from Odessa to Alexandria. Constantinople, mosques, dervishes, bazaars, the white marble quay at Smyrna, the Bedouins of Beirut, the white surf at Jaffa, black-green Mount Athos, plague-stricken Port Said, yellow-white Africa and Alexandria — with English policemen, stuffed crocodile sellers, the famous Tartus. What stood out particularly in all this was amazing Jerusalem, where I spent a week with the family of an Arab acquaintance'.

It was Konstantin Boklevsky who signed the lecture books (and subsequently the diplomas) of future shipbuilding engineers Evgeny Zamyatin, Boris Kharitonovich and Evgeny Bravin. In 1908, after receiving his diploma and the rank of marine engineer, Evgeny Zamyatin remained at the institute in a teaching capacity. In 1916–17, he was sent to England to take part in the construction of ice-breakers for the Russian Imperial Navy. That was one side of his character (the professional side), but there was another side: he began writing literature in his student days.

In 1921 in America, Zamyatin published his fantastical anti-utopian novel *We*, which brought him worldwide fame. In 1922, the writer was liable to exile abroad, but decided to remain in Soviet Russia. Right up until 1928, he lectured on shipbuilding and English to students of the technical departments of the Polytechnic Institute. He emigrated to France in 1931. His novel *We*



is currently enjoying a revival. For a long time it was seen as a picture of strict diktat over society and the individual, an evil caricature of socialism and communism 'in the thirty-second century' (names and surnames had been replaced by letters and numbers — the state even controlled intimate life). George Orwell admitted that he had written his celebrated anti-utopian *1984* under the direct influence of *We*. But today codes, passwords and other 'nicks' are realities of the new digital world. Such was the power of foresight of the talented engineer who became a perspicacious writer.

The lives of Zamyatin's fellow-students, whose portraits are also included in the album, turned out very differently. Boris Kharitonovich (1884–1938) was Chairman of the Union of Ma-



## Heritage



rine Engineers. From 1924 to 1930, he was chief engineer at the Russian Diesel plant and in 1931–32 supervised the assembly of the first Russian bloomings at the Izhora plant. From 1909 to 1930, he was a lecturer and subsequently Professor at the Polytechnic University in applied mechanics and ship architecture. He was repressed... On the other hand, Evgeny Bravin (1885–1972) lived a long life: from 1915 to 1917, he headed the Artillery-Technical Bureau at the Admiralty Plant, and lectured on ship architecture and hydraulic mechanisms at the Polytechnic University from 1913 to 1927. Doctor of Technical Sciences (1939), Rear-Admiral (1941). The biographies of each of them is worthy of study and interpretation.

The unique feature of the album is that it has preserved portraits of Russian emigres — those who left Russia in the chaos that followed the revolution and ended up in Belgrade and Prague, Warsaw and Berlin, Paris and New York. They include professors of shipbuilding Georgy Pio-Ulsky and Yakov Khlytchiev, professors of the engineering-construction department Boris Bakhmetev, Stanislav Belzetsky, Ivan Svischev...

They could have said in Pushkin's words: 'Wherever fate may take us...' Wherever they went and whatever ordeals they suffered, they remained Polytechnic people with a St. Petersburg education and upbringing. Georgy Pio-Ulsky (1864–1938) graduated from the Nikolayevsky Naval Academy in 1890 and was an engi-

Part of the museum today.

Evgeny Zamyatin's classmates in the shipbuilding department Boris Kharitonovich and Evgeny Bravin.

Examining new acquisitions: Semyon Mikhailovsky, Rector of the Academy of Arts, Andrey Rudskoy, Rector of the St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Roman Panov, Director of the University's History Museum.

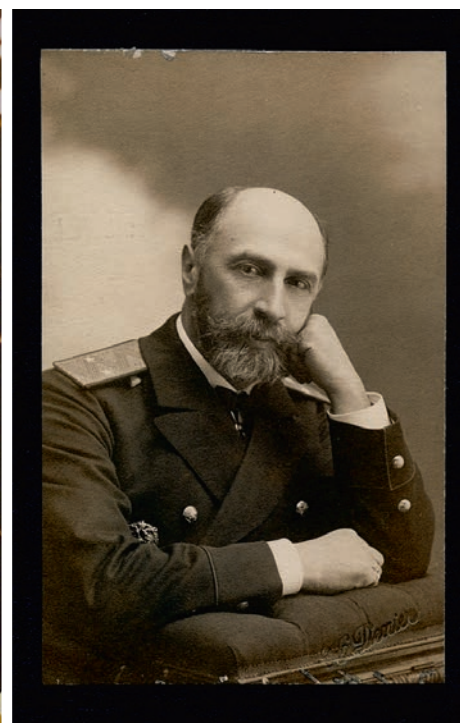




The museum's exhibits reflect the glorious history of the Polytechnic.

Even far away from Russia they remained Polytechnic people: Georgy Pio-Ulsky and Boris Bakhmetev.

neer-mechanic in the Baltic fleet. From 1906, he was a professor in the shipbuilding department of the St. Petersburg Polytechnic Institute. He is remarkable for being one of six full generals in the Russian army to have taught at the Polytechnic Institute. He introduced his own developments at the Baltic Shipbuilding and Mechanical Plant and together with engineers from the Brown-Bowery plant carried out a project for powerful steam turbines for the cruisers *Kinburn* and *Izmail*. In 1918, Pio-Ulsky took part in the creation of the Polytechnic Institute in Ekaterinodar (now Krasnodar). In 1920, he emigrated to Serbia, where he held an important position at the court of King Alexander I Karadjordjevic, since he had been Alexander's instructor when the future king was studying at the Page Corps in St. Petersburg. He was Profes-



sor of the Technical Faculty at Belgrade University and organized the Union of Russian Engineers in Yugoslavia. He is buried in the New Cemetery in Belgrade.

Not many people know about the Bakmeteff Archive of exclusive documents on Eastern European history and culture at Columbia University in New York. It is named after Polytechnic Institute graduate Boris Bakhmetev (1880–1951), a specialist in hydraulics and hydrodynamics and a political and public figure who taught in the Institute's engineering-construction department from 1907. In 1915, he was sent to the USA to purchase military equipment for the Russian army. In 1917, as Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry in the Provisional Government, he headed a mission to negotiate with the Americans



## Heritage



about a loan and became Russian ambassador in the USA. From 1931, Bakmetev was Professor of Civil Engineering at Columbia University. Another institution that bears his name is a humanitarian foundation created to support emigre Russian engineers and scientists. They include the television pioneer Vladimir Zvorykin, the astronomer Otto Struve, the aircraft designer Igor Sikorsky, the scientist-mechanic and material scientist Stepan Timoshenko (he worked at the polytechnic institutes in St. Petersburg and Kiev)...

A European Forum for Polytechnic graduates held recently in Berlin brought together those living and working in 22 different countries. And the first person to propose assembling Polytechnic graduates who had left Russia after the October

revolution was a man whose photograph appears in Professor Meshchersky's album! In the early 1920s, Nikolay Savvin participated in the revival of the Society of Former Polytechnic University Students, which had over 200 members in the 1950s, with headquarters in Paris and New York. Today the Association of St. Petersburg Polytechnic University Graduates can boast over 15,000 members, 20 % of whom live abroad.

History develops in spirals. By paying tribute to the memory of its outstanding professors and students, the Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University is solicitously preserving and augmenting the traditions of its predecessors. After all, it is they who founded the scientific and pedagogical schools for which our university is known all over the world.

Nikolay Savvin did a great deal towards bringing together the community of Polytechnic graduates abroad.

The Polytechnic University's History Museum preserves the memory of its outstanding professors and graduates.



# Immersion in Music

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A BRITISH PIANIST WITH LINKS TO TWO SCHOOLS OF PERFORMANCE — IN ENGLAND AND IN LENINGRAD —  
IS GRATEFUL TO HIS TEACHERS

Arkady SOSNOV. Photos: Rimsky-Korsakov St. Petersburg Conservatory Archive  
and Music Scientific Library, Valentin Baranovsky, Natasha Razina, © Mariinsky Theatre



Christian Blackshaw's performing schedule in Russia at the end of last year was reminiscent of the non-stop football that starts on Boxing Day in his native England: three concerts in four days. Two of them were in St. Petersburg, the second only eight hours before New Year, with a trip to Vladikavkaz between them. What is more, because his return flight from Vladikavkaz was delayed, the pianist got back to St. Petersburg only late in the evening before his final afternoon performance. Nevertheless, he agreed to be interviewed on 31 December after playing Mozart's 27<sup>th</sup> Piano Concerto. That concerto, the embodiment of 'purity of order' (the definition of music expert Mikhail Druskin), could not better suit Blackshaw's style that has won international recognition — exquisite, subtle and aesthetic to his fingertips.

The pianist readily took up the football analogy, but admitted that he was not a football fan — unlike maestro Valery Gergiev, who had invited him to take part in the 'Faces of Contemporary Pianism' Festival. Indeed, how could Christian have declined the invitation, considering that he had once studied in Leningrad and that the Vladikavkaz recital was in the new Philharmonic Hall, with the expected excellent acoustic, and the audience there was generous and in love with the music?

'The audience was so absorbed, so responsive to a classical programme!', he exclaimed. 'As far as the flights were concerned, difficulties are easier to bear in the company of Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven. For me that is the greatest repertoire.'



## Over the Barriers

*I had long wanted to meet Christian Blackshaw, the first British musician to study at the Leningrad Conservatory (1970–1972). A few years ago, at the request of a magazine editor, the composer Vlada Malakhovskaya chatted to Blackshaw in a circle of music experts and journalists after a concert in the Philharmonia, and it would be wrong not to quote from her notes:*

‘Only the stage was brightly lit. The crystal, almost weightless sounds of the piano resounded in the semidarkness of the auditorium, enchanting and spiralling. The web they wove was so fragile that it seemed a breath could tear it, and it was so beautiful that you were afraid to breathe. Christian Blackshaw was playing.

His name, once well known to music lovers, had almost been forgotten. The pianist did not perform for ten years (he does not speak about it, but after the death of his wife he had to devote all his time to bringing up his three daughters). And suddenly he burst on to the stage again, and how! “Blackshaw is a challenge thrown down to all performers,” wrote the Financial Times. “The best interpretation of Mozart for many years,” enthused the BBC Music Magazine.

When I went to Blackshaw’s solo concert in the Philharmonic Chamber Hall, I had been quite well prepared by the Russian and foreign press and knew that “his style of playing is incredibly expressive”, that “Mozart performed by Blackshaw and the LSO at St. Luke’s was extremely energetic”, that...

The first thing that struck me was the lights going out at the beginning of the concert. I do not remember anything like it. Technical problems? But the stage was illuminated and the pianist was not concerned. Perhaps he did not know that there should be light in the auditorium?

On the following day, in the art-basement of the Philharmonia, Blackshaw explained: “I like it when the lights are dimmed. I feel relaxed and comfortable, whereas in bright light I want to sit up straight”. And I have to agree with him — his playing requires



full immersion... No, that is not right — it immerses you. From the very first notes, you forget about the auditorium, the light and the rest of the audience and only Mozart exists. Or Schubert, or... I was going to write Liszt, but maybe not. Blackshaw’s performance of Liszt (like, probably, other composers) is undoubtedly impeccable, but I have never felt the magic that filled the air during Mozart’s *Fantasia* or a Schubert sonata. Or perhaps I simply do not like Liszt enough?

And, despite the articles about him, there was no “energy” or “expression”. Only filigree technique and a fantastically (beyond the bounds of credibility) delicate feel for the music. I do not even know how to characterize it — solicitous? loving? — but that is weak and inaccurate — his attitude to the music distinguishes the best pupils of Professor Khalfin: and Grigory Sokolov, and Pavel Gililov, and Vladimir Polyakov. But that attitude reached its peak, in my view, with Christian Blackshaw. That was probably what the enraptured critics were trying to express after his triumphal concerts, but could not find the right words’

*‘The Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall is wonderful in every respect. Yasuhisa Toyota certainly understands acoustics, just as Xavier Fabre, who built the hall, understands architecture. As far as I know, the project was finished very quickly. It is very comfortable and people definitely like it. I mean that a very beautiful hall with good acoustics and a well-cared-for instrument — a very meaningful combination — will always be full of people who love music’.*

Christian BLACKSHAW





*Christian Blackshaw on Valery Gergiev:  
'I would like to pay tribute to him,  
because he's an extraordinary genius  
as a musician, let alone his ability  
to get things done, to inspire  
and support people'.*

**And here is the long-awaited 'exclusive' interview that Christian, without waiting for questions, began on an emotional note:**

I always love playing in Russia — first of all, because I was quite a young man (I was 20, 21) when I came to study here and I remember the respect and love that Russian audiences have for opera, ballet, chamber music, piano recitals, song recitals... Unfortunately, I'm never able to spend quite enough time in St. Petersburg. I would like to go again to the Russian Museum, the Hermitage... I still haven't made it to the apartment where the great Tchaikovsky died... One day I would love to attend a class at the Vaganova Academy, to try to understand not only the discipline but also the ethos behind your wonderful ballet school here. I don't know about my colleagues, but I can learn so much about playing the piano from string players, from wind players, from singers, from ballet dancers, from actors — that comprehension comes from inside, it cannot be forced, and I think listeners understand if it's not natural.

## Over the Barriers

**Please explain why only the stage is illuminated when you play and it is dark in the auditorium. Does that make it easier to immerse the audience in the music?**

When I was young and just starting out in this profession, I already realized the importance of lighting in concert halls. Of course, it's very different if you're playing with an orchestra, because the conductor and the musicians have to be able to see their scores and I understand that. But in solo recitals I became much bolder and asked the organizers to dim the lights. It's not at all for theatrical effect — it's just that I feel more able to communicate the spirit of the music if it's not so bright. I think we all feel that if you go into somebody's home and there are very bright lights you feel a little uncomfortable. I don't know about anybody else. I don't even know what's going on inside my own head, but if the lighting is ambient and warm I feel more comfortable. And it's the same with giving a recital. Usually people like it — there are bound to be some who don't, and that's fine, but I find it more comfortable in order to give more when I'm not surrounded by bright lights.

**You have great experience of collaboration with Valery Gergiev. On what is that experience based?**

I would like to pay tribute to him, because he's an extraordinary genius as a musician, let alone his ability to get things done, to inspire and support people. Here is an example of how kind he is. Many years ago — in 1990, to be precise — I was asked if I would go to play the Schumann Concerto — one performance in Rotterdam and one at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

I said I was sorry but I couldn't play in Rotterdam as I was already engaged to play Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Concerto (the *Emperor*) the previous evening with the great Yehudi Menuhin conducting one of the British orchestras. We agreed that I would just perform in Amsterdam. I was very excited, because I had never played in the Concertgebouw before. I slept for just two hours and flew off at 7 am to



## Over the Barriers

rehearse with Valery Gergiev and the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. We got to Amsterdam and there was no orchestra there for the rehearsal. I rang my agent and asked where the orchestra was — it was already 9.30 and the rehearsal was at 10. She said ‘didn’t you get our letter?’ I’d been busy, I hadn’t received a letter. She said the rehearsal had been changed to Rotterdam.

So I had to jump in a taxi and rush to Rotterdam for the rehearsal, but it was impossible to rush because of the traffic and I was getting more and more nervous. I arrived in Rotterdam at 11.45 and saw Valery, who was standing by the entrance to the stage at the Doelen Hall. I said ‘I’m sorry, the agent told me...’ He said ‘Don’t worry, agents sometimes get these things wrong. We’ll rehearse now for 15 minutes, then go to Amsterdam.’ The whole thing was chaotic, but he was so calm and so kind! Immediately he quietened everything down, and we played in Amsterdam.

I’ve not played with the maestro very often, but it is always an honour for me. And twenty years ago, actually, was the first time he invited me to the White Nights Festival to play this very concerto. It’s quite uncanny that it happens to be the same one now. I recently played it in America and it’s a concerto I particularly love — it’s got many associations. Valery is a great master and has always kept a little eye out for me, as he does for so many artists. Even today in the rehearsal, the things he was saying to the musicians, just little promptings, sounded so inspiring... And I hope we gave the spirit of the wonderful music to the listeners.

**Your study at the Leningrad Conservatory was fifty years ago. How did you manage to pierce the Iron Curtain?**

First of all, I’d done everything quite early. I’m from the north of England — I studied at the Royal College in Manchester and received my diploma when I was 19 — not 21, like most graduates. My teacher was an extraordinary man — Gordon Green. He knew it would be a good idea to go somewhere abroad and the only place





I wanted to come was Russia, because I'd heard Gilels, Richter and other Russian pianists, and I had seen a ballet at the Bolshoi. I wanted to study in Russia because I felt there's a sensibility about whatever the soul is. You have a wonderful spirit and I wanted to somehow understand more about it and perhaps imbibe something from it. There were other tempting offers — Vienna or Paris, but I always thought Russia was the right place for me. I had to wait until I was 20 to apply for a scholarship. In those days, it was a joint programme between the Soviet Ministry of Culture and the British Council — they offered performing arts scholarships. A friend of mine, a cellist, was studying with Rostropovich in Moscow and he said 'why don't you try?' So I did and was lucky enough to get the scholarship, though they changed Moscow to Leningrad.

Moisey Khalfin, Lia Zelikhman and their pupil Grigory Sokolov. Late 1960s.



### Were you disappointed?

Oh, please don't be offended! It's just that I'd set my heart on Moscow, because we knew in England that there were some famous professors there, but knew nothing about those in Leningrad. I started asking about them, and a chance meeting on the ship on my way here helped me. A girl from Finland, who was studying piano in Leningrad, told me about Professor Moisey Khalfin and his wife Lia Zelikhman, who had taught Grigory Sokolov at the Conservatory's special school. She warned me that Professor Khalfin's class was oversubscribed and it would be impossible to study with him. When I got here, I asked Khalfin through an interpreter whether it would be possible to audition with him. For some reason, he agreed. I had to play a Liszt sonata that I had played for my finals at college. The students all sat around and listened. He accepted me on the spot and we began to work together. He was wonderful — his understanding of music. Little by little, we got to the point where he said I was improving — after about four, maybe five months.

*Blackshaw's fellow students told us how Blackshaw's phenomenal style of playing was formed. Vlada Malakhovskaya sought out Ksenia Polyakova, who now lives and works in Germany. Here is an excerpt from her recollections:*

The first foreign students at the Conservatory (Mexicans, Columbians, a Finn, two or three Poles and one Englishman) kept to themselves, all except the Poles. One of the Poles, Stanisław Deja, became Christian's close friend. The foreigners all lived in a hostel. Christian also took lessons in Russian and quite rapidly mastered the language. His piano lessons were translated by Nadya Eismont, another of Khalfin's students.

Khalfin treated Christian just like his other students. In the West it is not customary to criticize pupils, as they may be offended — you can only praise them. Here it is quite different! Moisey Khalfin was a straightforward man — he always said what he thought directly to your face. Christian was an exemplary student, a perfectionist, so he react-



## Over the Barriers

ed emotionally to reprimands. He took them badly. He was sensitive and self-critical. Khalfin had very stringent demands — after all, only the best of the best were accepted in his class! He once set Christian the task of learning a Prokofiev concerto by heart in the right tempo. Christian was in shock. He did not even know where to get the music, but he found it and learned it all in a short time.

Christian had a reverent attitude to Khalfin. He came with us to visit him when he was discharged from hospital. He was very surprised that a professor at the Conservatory lived in a communal flat... When Professor Khalfin passed away, Christian wrote an article about him in a book that was published in St. Petersburg — a very heartfelt piece...

While we were studying, the foreign students were very afraid of the words 'communist' and 'communist youth'. They visited people, but they were afraid — we could, but they could not. But they trusted us — we were all graduates of the Conservatory's ten-year preparatory school and we explained that things were not at all as awful as they seemed...

*Nadezhda Eismont, now Assistant Professor in the St. Petersburg Conservatory Special Piano Department, added to Ksenia's account:*

Christian Blackshaw joined Professor Khalfin's class in 1970. At that time, there were very few students or *stazhors* (trainees) from Western Europe at the Conservatory. The foreigners were mainly 'our people', i. e. from the socialist bloc or from developing countries. I was in my fifth year of study, so had more free time than my fellow students. I knew, or thought I knew, a little English, so Khalfin scheduled Christian's lesson after mine so that I could stay and translate his remarks. After the lesson, we could afford the time to take a stroll around our beautiful city. The whole first term passed like that — lessons, then a stroll of two or three hours. In the second term that was no longer necessary, as Christian had begun to understand Russian and I had state exams in April and no time for strolls.

Christian used to say that he had come with the aim of working on pieces by Russian composers — I remember in particular that

he studied Prokofiev's 3rd Concerto. He was always trying to *understand*: the professor's demands and my poor English, but I think, most importantly, he wanted to *understand Russia* in order to play Russian music, not merely learn a particular work by heart. It was obvious that he was an extraordinarily talented musician with an outstanding personality, and also professionally trained, but he still practised an incredible amount — 8–10 hours a day at the piano (plus Russian lessons). This seemed not quite usual for our students. For instance, I was surprised by his habit of writing detailed fingering literally over each note — evidence of his scrupulous work on the music, on every phrase, and his attention to every detail. Professor Khalfin worked with him just as attentively and painstakingly, and Christian absorbed it all like a sponge.

Leningrad Conservatory. 1960s.





Unfortunately, I have been able to attend only a few of Christian Blackshaw's concerts in recent years, but I should like to recall only two of them: an extraordinarily profound, meditative and heartfelt performance of Franz Schubert's great Sonata in A major in the Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall and an argument between Christian and one of his fellow-countrymen in the wings after a concert in the Philharmonic Chamber Hall. The argument was about Russia, which was again being criticised in the West for some reason, and Christian was selflessly defending our country, which he had evidently been able to understand during his studies here.

Nadezhda Eismont also mentioned how Christian and Stanisław Deja had visited her home and had enjoyed the borscht cooked by her mother Lyudmila Umanskaya, a professor at the Conservatory (Deja was one of her pupils).

### **Just imagine, Christian has never forgotten any of this:**

Of course I remember Ksenia, Nadya, Nina Glushenkova (Senior Teacher in the Conservatory's Department of Foreign Languages), who was my Russian teacher, and Stanisław Deja. Stashek and I were very different personalities, but we seemed to get on very well, so we spent quite a lot of time together. There was also a very nice girl from Norway, Anna, who played the horn. I had a very nice roommate in the hostel who was Armenian — from Baku, I think. I met Grigory Sokolov just briefly on only one occasion, but I can remember his beautiful sound to this day, even — dare I say it — on the East German instrument in the class. It's still there, I think. Of course, I would love to meet him again.

We studied for one full year, because there was no Christmas then, of course. I applied for a second year, which they granted to me, but my father suddenly got very ill and died and I was in the air when he died. That was in October 1971 — a very, very long time ago. Then the professor's wife Lia Zelikhman sadly died. So there was a period when I stayed in England, but I returned and

we had about six months. The second year was shorter because of these personal matters, but it was a very meaningful time. I think at the age of 21 you're able to assimilate the path you wish to go down. He encouraged me hugely and I'm deeply grateful to him.

Of course, there were some difficulties, but the most important thing was to be part of a musical life — to be surrounded by and immersed in music. I used to go to the Kirov Theatre to see ballet — less opera. I heard so many concerts by the Philharmonic Orchestra with the great Mravinsky conducting and soloists such as Richter, Rostropovich, David Oistrakh and Rudolf Kehr. I was present at the premiere — I'm not sure if it was the world premiere — of Shostakovich's 13th String Quartet in the Philharmonic Chamber Hall played by the Beethoven Quartet. Shostakovich was there and he came on stage. People were crying, clapping and shouting. He was very modest and made a little bow, and the quartet repeated the whole work for us, which was wonderful.

### **We know very little about how your life panned out after your study in Leningrad.**

When I left Russia, I didn't know quite what my future would be, so I went back to my wonderful teacher Gordon Green, who was also teaching at the Royal Academy in London — he taught in both Manchester and London. Then I won a competition in Italy, was taken on by an agent in London and started performing little by little.

About five years later — that was in 1979 — I went to a wonderful British pianist, very famous in our country — Sir Clifford Curzon, who was a magician-poet at the piano. He recognized something in me and thought that he might be able to help me. He had mercurial hands that were magically connected with the keyboard. For the last three years of his life, I used to go regularly to see him and we'd talk about Mozart, Schubert and Schumann. One day I plucked up the courage to ask him who of all the pianists he had heard he most admired. I was expecting a different answer, because he had studied with Wanda

Christian Blackshaw as a stazhor at Leningrad Conservatory. 1970.





## Over the Barriers

Landowska, Nadia Boulanger and Artur Schnabel, but he said, without hesitation, Sviatoslav Richter!.. So I had three extraordinary men in my life who guided me in the direction I needed to go — Gordon Green, Moisey Khalfin and Clifford Curzon. It was lucky, because if you have the wrong person, they can alter your whole outlook.

### **There was also a very difficult period in your life...**

Actually, it was the same year as when I played in Amsterdam. Many people have tragedies, sadnesses, and I think your strength is tested. I am absolutely no hero at all, but I just wanted to be with my children, rather than employing someone to look after them. The problem is that you fall out of the consciousness of promoters, agents and other people in our musical world. Also, at that time I had nothing to show them, because I'd always politely declined the opportunity to record for that famous German company with the yellow label (*Deutsche Grammophon* — A. S.), as I didn't feel ready to commit to something so serious. My agent in London thought I was absolutely mad not to do it, but I knew I was right.

Memories are very short — people forget you if they don't see and hear you, and then it's very difficult to come back and reassert yourself — especially for me, as I'm a very sensitive sort of person. The only ones who remembered were people like Valery Gergiev, because we'd played together, and also Simon Rattle, who engaged me when he could. A friend at the BBC was also very kind to me...

Up to then I hadn't played very much at the Wigmore Hall — they have a top piano series, and I just went to listen. I chatted to the manager of the hall and he included me in a recital. Thankfully, it went very well and they engaged me for a Mozart series and recorded it... so in the last seven or eight years my life has changed dramatically. Maybe it was meant to be — I'm quite philosophical about these things. Why did I end up in Leningrad rather than Moscow? Why did I meet Valery? Why are my children all right?



Why, why, why? Somehow you have a path — maybe it's ordained by a higher being, I don't know, but you go down the road that you go down and hope you don't take a wrong turn.

At the end of our interview, Christian Blackshaw described the schedule of his forthcoming performances in the same exalted company: Beethoven, Schubert and Mozart. He mentioned in particular that he would be playing in the Wigmore Hall on 27 January, Mozart's birthday. He was pleased that there would soon be a statue of Tchaikovsky outside the Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall: since it is Valery Gergiev's idea, its success is guaranteed!

'I don't play much Tchaikovsky, but I revere the man and his music, which reaches such philosophical heights — not only in opera, though *The Queen of Spades* and *Eugene Onegin* are among my favourites. Tchaikovsky adored Mozart, whom I also adore. Yet I have taken part in the Tchaikovsky Competition and played his 1st Piano Concerto. It is the dream of many musicians, and for me the dream came true.'

*Christian BLACKSHAW on the process of interpretation: 'A musician is a chef. He works his magic on a dish, adding various ingredients, some of them mystical. The recipe seems simple, but is difficult to recreate'.*

*On authentic performance: 'Can we really say with confidence how pianists played 200 years ago? My head can't get round that. I play as my brain prompts me. How can one penetrate into the mind, the perception of the composer? Schumann, for instance, grew up in the family of a translator and as a child was surrounded by books, whereas Liszt was from a less 'intellectual' background. But both of them expressed their emotions through piano music.*

*Also, in those 200 years the instrument itself has changed, halls have become larger and more numerous, with bigger audiences. How did Liszt sound when he played? How did Schumann? On the other hand, in the second movement of Schubert's Sonata in A major it is necessary to convey the feelings of man who did not have long to live. It can only be played as the composer intended'.*

*On Mozart: 'In the early sonatas he is like a cabinetmaker demonstrating his mastery to a client. In his later works he is dictating to the listener what he should hear'.*

*On audiences: 'People are not stupid. An audience can always hear if the composer has invested his music with real emotions. And it can also hear whether you are able to play the music you are trying to play'.*

*Recorded by Vlada MALAKHOVSKAYA*



# The Embroidery Man and the Cinema Crank

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## THE UNIQUE COLLECTIONS OF A REGIONAL MUSEUM IN BULGARIA

Dr. Daniel PENERLIEV, Director of the Shumen Regional History Museum (Bulgaria). Reproductions: from the museum's archives



The pride of any museum is its collections, predominantly those on particular themes. The regional history museum in the ancient city of Shumen, whose reserves include over 150,000 items, has such collections of rarities as 'Thracian Armaments,' 'Filigree Adornments' and 'Postcards.' In addition to those, we are fortunate to possess two collections of national and international importance: 'Embroidery' (in our 'Ethnography' section) and 'Film Posters' (in the 'New History' section). The account of their formation and history in our regional museum is fascinating and instructive.

Bulgarian embroidery began to be collected as soon as the museum was founded in 1904, the prime mover in this being Vasil Petrov Dobrudzhaliev, one of the curators, who was nicknamed 'The Embroidery Man' on account of his passion for this type of decorative applied art. The collection includes traditional and typical examples of embroidery from almost all the ethnographic re-

gions of current and former Bulgarian territories: Kapan, Trevnen, Shopi, Macedonia, Samokov, Elkhovo, Vidin, etc. — no other museum in the country can boast such a rich and varied collection. There are also embroidered ornaments on various items of clothing — shirtfronts and collars, tablecloths and sokai (a type of headdress). Vasil Petrov's highly professional descriptions of embroidery in the museum's inventory books are of particular value for ethnographers. Thanks to these 'resumes,' we know the old names for the ornaments and that helps to reveal the concept of an embroidered pattern.

Curators from the museum's ethnographic department added to the collection, trying not to lower the standard set by Petrov. They received relics as donations and, where necessary, purchased them from their owners. In every case, the museum and the owners were conscientious partners — a guarantee of mutual interest and continued collaboration.



## Over the Barriers

In 2018, our museum joined forces with three other cultural institutions to organize an exhibition of Bulgarian embroidery in Shumen. This symbiosis enabled us to fill in the gaps in our display. One characteristic detail: the catalogue issued to accompany the exhibition became a bestseller and was sold out down to the last copy, which shows the growing interest in this type of cultural valuables not only of specialists but also of ordinary visitors. The display has now been transferred to Burgas, to one of the participants in the project, and is attracting general attention in that coastal city. With all due respect to 'domestic' embroidery, this effect was quite unexpected for us. The probable explanation is that embroidery, though sometimes plain in appearance, is encoded with traditional Bulgarian national identity — elements of our nation's outlook on the world and philosophy of life, passed down from generation to generation. These patterns enable us to trace our roots.

Another remarkable collection consists of film posters amassed by Rostislav Bakalov, a native of Shumen whom contemporaries called a cinema crank. In fact, he was a collector of European stature.

Rostislav was born in 1912 — the year the city's largest and most famous cinema opened. He became obsessed with films from the age of fourteen: he began subscribing to French, German and Bulgarian film magazines and collecting photographs of actors and posters. He became an active member of the film fans' association that had been formed in Shumen. While still in the top class at school, he was given the job of designing posters at a military cinema, and in 1936 he became its director. In 1937, he went still further: he set up *Rosmark-Film*, a semi-professional film studio, with the well-known Shumen photographer Mark Markarian. The first film they made on their 8-millimetre camera was *Adventures in Indiana*.

Bakalov was responsible for the only manuscript publication about the cinema and everything to do with it — not only in Bulgaria, but in the whole of Europe. The first issue of *Cinema News* came out on 2 January 1929. There were twenty more issues in the two years







Rostislav Bakalov and cinema posters from his collection.



that followed, with a strict system of rubrics, headings and leading articles, a designation of the price and precise dating that showed the periodicity of the publication. While the latest issue was being passed from hand to hand, Bakalov was already working on the next one. The magazine featured news from the sets of future films and information about the directors and actors engaged in them. There were also articles about cultural events in Bulgaria, such as the reopening of the Ivan Bazov Folk Theatre in Sofia after the fire of 1922. And, of course, the editor could not ignore the opening of a new cinema in Shumen. The texts were accompanied by portraits of international film stars that Rostislav Bakalov drew himself.

It now seems incredible that one man, working as assiduously as a star pupil at school, could compile a record of all the films shown in Shumen from 1926 to 1930, listing the roles and the surnames of the actors, the emblems of the film companies and the dates and places of the showings! It is an unbelievable contribution to the history of

the cinema in Shumen, as is the collection of 2,280 genuine posters amassed by Bakalov — some of them came to the city with the relevant films, others he himself drew and had printed. It was purchased from his descendants on the initiative of the museum and is now part of our collection.

Most of the posters were produced using the lithograph technique. According to Rostislav Bakalov's memoirs, his first poster invited cinemagoers to watch the adventures of the popular Danish comic actors *Pat and Patachon* — *Fishermen*. The oldest example is a poster for Charlie Chaplin's 1925 film *The Gold Rush* — in Bulgarian. There is an interesting story connected with that poster: at the end of last century, a British collector saw the rarity in the museum display and wanted to buy it for a large sum of money. Needless to say, his offer was politely declined.

Indeed, the collection has to remain in Bulgaria: cinema experts from the national film library use it to take copies of posters for Bul-



## Over the Barriers



garian films missing from their collection. The value of the collection is that it can be used in various exhibitions, regardless of the historical period, geography, subject matter and genre of the films (for example, a costumed drama or a musical). Posters for Hungarian films have twice been shown in Budapest and in the 'Balassi' Hungarian Cultural Institute in Sofia. Our museum has displayed posters for films about the Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878, which led to the liberation of Bulgaria. We have also staged an exhibition of posters for comedy films featuring actors from various countries in the Museum of Humour and Satire in Gabrovo.

The Shumen Regional Museum has published two catalogues with posters from Rostislav Bakalov's collection — the first devoted to Bulgarian films and the second to foreign films. A third catalogue devoted exclusively to Soviet films is currently in preparation. The collection includes a total of 93 posters for Soviet films, the earliest being for *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

Both the abovementioned collections are the property of our museum and are part of its main fund. We revere the people by whose efforts the collections originated: Vasil Petrov Dobrudzhaliev and Rostislav Bakalov are mentioned with gratitude at every opportunity, such as a new exhibition of publications on embroidery or the cinema.

The former is of great interest from a scientific point of view, by virtue of the aforementioned interest of specialists in deciphering the ancient Bulgarian ciphers that feature in various embroidered patterns. It is also in demand with amateur clubs of traditional embroidery, which reconstruct this ancient art on the basis of models from Shumen and thus preserve it for future generations. The film posters are predominantly of exhibition value. They can be used, as we do, to stage exhibitions in a wide range of locations — from Bulgaria to America and Asia. We would be glad to find a partner in Russia to organize a similar exhibition in your country!

*Dr. Daniel Rumenov PENERLIEV does a great deal to reinforce cultural links between Bulgaria and Russia.*

*He took part in the International Kochubey Readings in 2019 in Pushkin (a project of the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg), is initiating collaboration between his museum and the St. Petersburg Agrarian University and gives public lectures to students about the cultural and historical heritage of the Shumen region.*





# United by the Theatre

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PARTICIPANTS IN SOCIAL AND INCLUSIVE PROJECTS ARE CONQUERING THE RUSSIAN STAGE

Karina VERIGINA. Photos: 'So-edinenie' Foundation Press Office, 'Inclusion' Centre Press Office, Babel Theatre, 'Special View' Festival, Social Art Theatre, Maria Kovalyuk, Boris Pavlovich, Mikhail Patlasov, Darya Khripach



In the past decade, theatre has moved closer to the people. Productions are now staged in factories, on public transport, at the bar counter and even in the bathroom of an ordinary St. Petersburg flat. Theatre has become accessible not only to professional actors, but also to representatives of social groups that were previously invisible to the general public, giving them the possibility of entering into a dialogue with theatregoers — a chance to be heard.

The definition of social theatre is simple: it is productions that either raise socially important subjects or draw groups of people outside mainstream theatre into the creative process. Inclusive theatre is a narrower concept meaning the participation of people with special developmental problems.

'The actors in our theatre are inclusive in the broadest sense of the word,' says Dutch theatre director Paul Röttger, Artistic Director of the Babel Theatre: 'young and old; rich and poor; people with Down's syndrome; people from a migrant background; people from the LGBTQ + community; completely healthy people and those with a chronic condition such as HIV; people suffering from mental, eating and other disorders; people from different religious



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backgrounds; people with addictions, including drug addicts. Anybody who is different from you in some way can be an actor. And sometimes that means that you are the one who is different.'

In December, Röttger, one of the leading specialists in inclusive theatre, held a master class in Russia as part of the 2019 Theatre Olympics, bringing together professional actors, actors with hearing and mental problems and representatives of various social groups on the Alexandrinsky Theatre's New Stage in St. Petersburg.

'If this is an example of the state of inclusive theatre in Russia, then you are far more advanced than most other countries,' says Röttger, but with a caveat. 'Much remains to be done, both

in Russia and in the Netherlands, to ensure that inclusive theatre opens eyes and doors and shows this new way of creating art.'

The first shoots of social theatre in Russia appeared at the beginning of the last decade and it has reached the peak of its development in recent years. There are now numerous theatre companies all over the country highlighting social problems. The best-known include the 'Krug' and 'Krug II' studios in Moscow, the 'Inclusion' Creative Projects Centre, the 'ZAzhi-voe' project of the Yeltsin Centre in Yekaterinburg, the 'Upsala Circus' in St. Petersburg, the 'Theatrical Perspective' project in Moscow and others. Their example shows how this trend is developing in Russia.

### Page 38:

Paul Röttger with actors of the Babel theatre: 'Anyone who differs from you in some way can be an actor'.

*Carmen* — inclusive production in the Hermitage Theatre. Alexey Gorelov and Anora Khalmatova. St. Petersburg. 2016.

In *The Touchables* deaf and blind people and professional actors appear together.







A scene from *The Touchables*.

Tatiana Konstantinova, Executive Director of the 'So-edinenie' Deaf and Blind Support Foundation.



### THE EFFECT OF THE 'TOUCHABLES'

The Russian public was introduced to inclusive theatre by *The Touchables*, a production by the 'So-edinenie' Support Foundation for the Blind and Deaf and the Theatre of Nations in which people who are deaf and blind act with professionals. Not surprisingly, it was nominated for a Golden Mask award in 2016.

'I saw the audience's faces when they came into the auditorium and when they went out,' says Tatiana Konstantinova, Executive Director of the 'So-edinenie' Foundation. 'The production causes an incredible leap forward in the mental acceptance of people with special characteristics. In an ordinary environment, this would take several years, maybe decades. And these changes in the attitude to people with hearing and seeing difficulties are irreversible.'

*The Touchables* has been performed in leading theatres in Russia and abroad for several years. The actors with special diffi-

culties appear with stars — Yevgeny Mironov, Ingeborga Dapkunaite and Yevgeny Tsyganov.

'The success of our productions abroad is also a sort of people's diplomacy,' says Konstantinova. 'When we perform an inclusive production, foreign audiences can see that we are not aggressors, we don't take chained bears for walks in the morning, we are not soaked in vodka — in fact, we are highly developed, cultured people.'

The production was a point of reference for the 'Inclusion' Creative Projects Centre, founded by the 'So-Edinenie' Foundation after the success of *The Touchables*. The Centre's main aim is the development of professional inclusive theatre in Russia. In three years, 'Inclusion' has opened theatrical schools in six cities, staged fifteen productions and involved over a hundred people in its projects.

'For the majority of our inclusive students and actors, taking part in a theatrical project is not just going on stage but also an opportunity for personal and creative development, new knowledge, new friends, new horizons,' says Tatiana Medyukh, Director of the Centre. 'We are now trying to make the young people independent, encouraging them in their own creative initiatives.'

Medyukh thinks *The Touchables* is an excellent way of integrating deaf and blind people into society. The shining example is Alexey Gorelov, who was sitting at home after finally losing his sight and losing his job at a factory. During rehearsals for *The Touchables* it became apparent that Alexey was a talented actor with an excellent memory. As a result, he has performed several difficult roles in various productions, including dance productions (the premiere of *Carmen* was presented in the Hermitage Theatre on Maecenas Day 2016). But that is not all — Alexey started to train seriously for the triathlon and is now the only deaf and blind athlete in Russia and only the fifth in the world to complete the Olympic distance.



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### WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE PRINCIPAL ROLES

The next social production to enthrall the theatrical community and to make the long list for the Golden Mask award was Mikhail Patlasov's documentary project *The Untouchables*, in which homeless people appeared on stage at St. Anne's Lutheran Church with professional actors from the Tovstonogov Bolshoy Drama Theatre, the Alexandrinsky Theatre and the Baltic House Theatre-Festival. Some of the homeless took the main parts.

The production was the first documentary project in Russia about the homeless. Patlasov's team, which included directors and playwrights, spent over six months collecting the real stories of people at the 'Nochlezhka' charity, chatting to them in the refuge, at 'Night Bus' stops and places where homeless people can warm themselves. Others who took part in the preparations for the production were composer Oleg Karavaychuk (one of his last works) and street artist Vladimir Abikh.

Well known for his productions in the documentary theatre genre, Patlasov intended to stage a social reconstruction of Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* and to find people similar to the characters in the play at doss-houses in St. Petersburg.

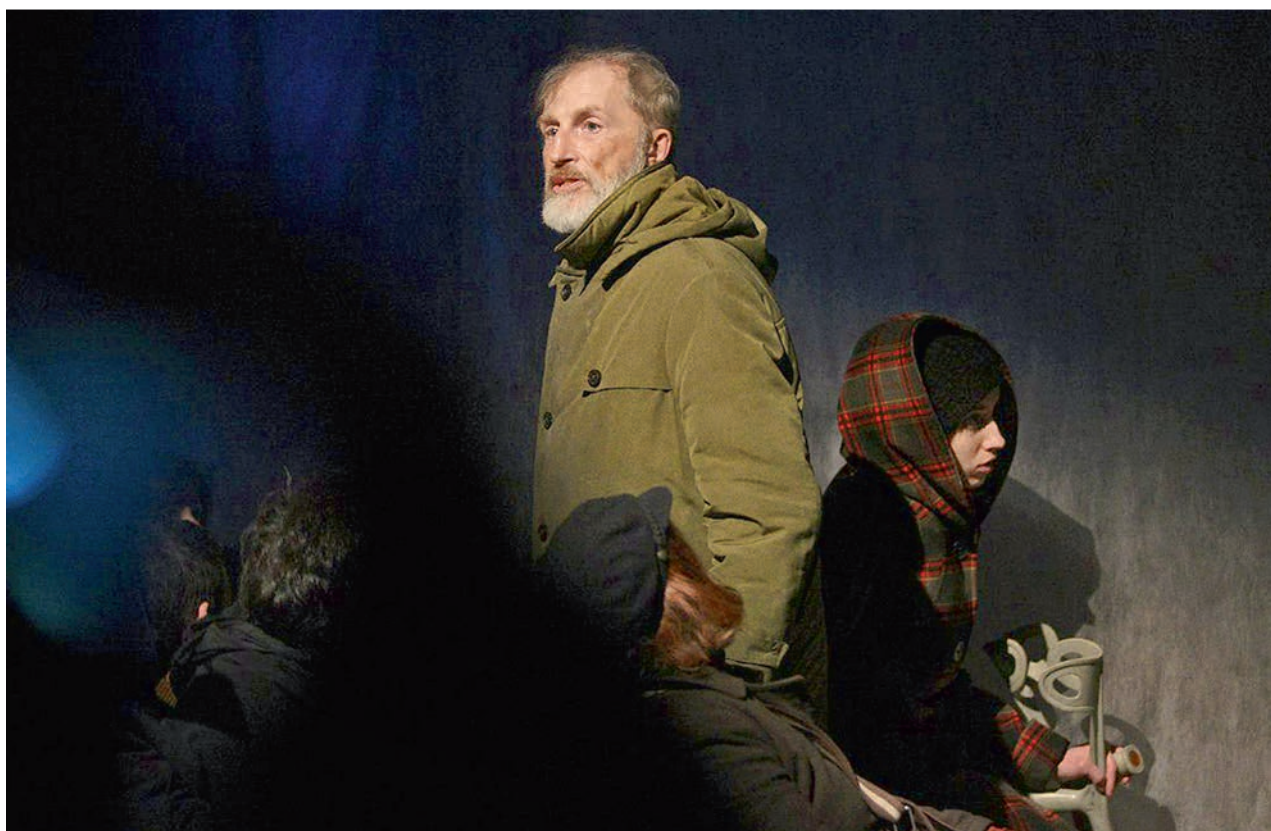
'But when I visited a doss-house, my world turned upside-down', the director admits. 'I realized that no quotes were necessary. Although Vyacheslav Rasner [one of the homeless actors in the production] reads Satin's monologue about man, that is all that remains from my original idea. It was then that it became clear that these lives must be changed.'

The money for the staging of *The Untouchables* was raised through crowdfunding and all the homeless who took part in the production received a regular salary. The experience of acting has affected them in different ways.

'Life for a homeless person is both awful and wonderful', says Mikhail Patlasov. 'During this project I have seen how people go down, then come up again. For some of them everything is OK.'



Mikhail Patlasov, the leading Russian theatre director-documentalist, at the premiere of *The Untouchables* in 2016.



Vyacheslav Rasner, who acts in *The Untouchables*, officially ceased to be homeless in 2017. Thanks to the assistance of people who were not indifferent, he moved into his own flat.





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Some disappear from the radar. Some die. This experience helps some to go further but it breaks others. I realized that you should never give anyone up for lost.

### THE SONOROUS 'LANGUAGE OF BIRDS'

Director Boris Pavlovich was the first to stage a repertoire inclusive production in a state theatre in Russia. In his *Language of Birds*, professional actors from the Tovstonogov Bolshoy Drama Theatre and students from the 'Anton's Right Here' Centre of social rehabilitation, study and creativity for adults with autism. The play is based on a philosophical poem by the Sufi thinker Farid ud-Din Attar about the travels of birds in search of their king.

The actors spent over a year together, trying to invent a universal 'bird language' — a language of signs, sounds and looks that they use to communicate with each other and with the audience.

'We had a lot of different adventures during that time,' recalls Pavlovich. 'We spent two weeks in a summer camp near Yaroslavl, living in semi-forest conditions. We sailed on the river and sat by the campfire in the evenings. It was an important experience of life away from civilization. It was also an experience that broadened the consciousness of both the people with autism and the professional actors. All that experience is reflected in the play in one way or another.'

Under Pavlovich's leadership, the participants in the production, which was nominated for a Golden Mask award in 2017 in the 'Experiment' category, continued their collaboration in the Kvartira (Apartment) project. For a year and a half, a spacious apartment in the centre of St. Petersburg became a theatre space with a repertoire of four inclusive productions.

The team is now continuing its creative activity as a production centre. Its most recent work was the open horizontal pro-



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ject *City. Conversations*, staged in conjunction with the Danish C: NTACT Theatre. The coordinator of the project was the 'Alma Mater' Foundation. It featured thirteen cities in Russia and abroad and stories of actual people on the subject 'How have I survived?'

'They are stories of man's victory over circumstances, stories of the triumph of life over death' Pavlovich explains. 'It is important that audiences see them in urban locations: in bars, cafes and bookshops. After all, the idea of the project is that we have to meet and talk more often. People in cities today live side by side without noticing one another. We have stopped chatting as we used to do, when strangers could strike up a conversation on a park bench or on a long train journey. That is why we perform the play in crowded places, but with free entry. It is not a theatre where you need to buy a ticket — the project is absolutely open and free. In various locations dozens of stories are told, and each of them becomes the basis for lengthy discussion.'

### WORKING A MIRACLE

The Social Art Theatre in St. Petersburg was founded on the initiative of Larisa Gracheva, a teacher at the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts, and students of her workshop, who after graduating in 2016 had the burning desire to create their own theatre — a theatre whose main aim would be to provide assistance to people in need. It is now the only theatre company in Russia focusing on social issues.

The theatre's repertoire includes productions on the subjects of feminism, violence and teenage aggression. One of the most vivid and hard-hitting of them is *The Miracle Worker*, based on the play by William Gibson. The theatre not only stages plays but also runs training sessions for socially vulnerable groups. For instance, in 2017, a programme of psychologi-



cal correction by means of acting training led to *Plays of Life*, a production that included people who had undergone rehabilitation after treatment for drug and alcohol addiction. In 2019, director Dmitry Krestyankin and residents of children's homes in St. Petersburg staged the play *Odyssey 2K19*, based on Homer's poem and documentary material collected by the teenagers themselves.

'In our project, art and culture are not entertainment, where people go to the theatre to spend time pleasantly', says Olga Guseva, who became the theatre's director after Larisa Gracheva's untimely death in 2019. 'No, these are real psychological studies, which can be taken in doses. They help towards the recovery of the 'patient' — spiritually, mentally and physically.'

Although the Social Art Theatre receives federal and city grants, the actors take part in the productions on an unpaid basis. All the money goes towards new productions and payment

One of the Social Art Theatre's most vivid and hard-hitting productions: *The Miracle Worker*, based on the play by William Gibson.

**Page 42:**  
Actors from the Bolshoy Drama Theatre and students from the 'Anton's Right Here' Centre spent over a year together, trying to invent their own special 'bird' language.

The open horizontal project *City. Conversations* featured thirteen cities in Russia and abroad.





People who had undergone rehabilitation after treatment for drug and alcohol addiction took part in *Plays of Life*.

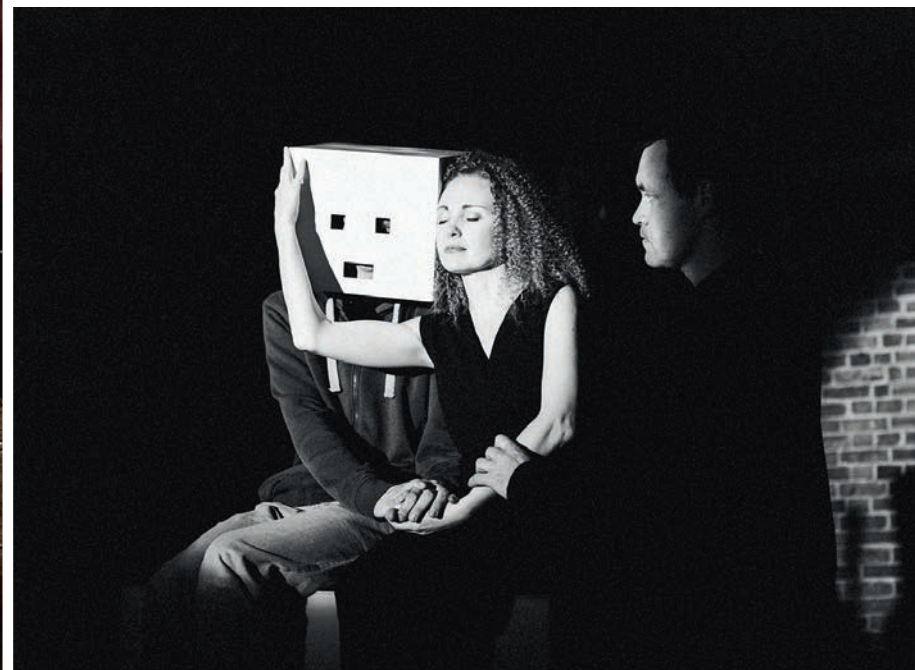
A scene from the Altay Youth Theatre's production *Wonder Boy* about teenagers. Twelve plays were performed at the 'Special View' Forum-Festival.

of theatre fees. Also, some participants in the training sessions on social adaptation remain in the theatre as volunteers.

'We are homeless', admits Guseva, after finishing a speech training session in one of the rooms of the Borey Gallery in the midst of visitors looking at the display. The enthusiasts of the Social Art Theatre have no permanent stage, but that does not lessen their ambition: to bring all participants in social projects together in a united city community.

'The theatre is a place with a special atmosphere that attracts people and draws them in, but a social theatre takes its space to people who need help, because they have no access to the theatre', Guseva explains. 'That is why we take the theatre to them and show them that the world is united: our world, the theatrical world and the world of problems — they are all one. And problems can be solved by interaction.'

## Cultural Layer



### A 'SPECIAL VIEW' IS NECESSARY

The interrelationship and unity of Russian 'knights of inclusion' was highlighted in 'Special View', the country's first social theatre forum-festival, held in Moscow in October 2019. It was organized by the 'Art, Science and Sport' Foundation and the 'Inclusion' Creative Projects Centre with the support of the Presidential Grants Foundation and the 'So-edinenie' Deaf and Blind Support Foundation.

'This festival has been coming for a long time', thinks Ksenia Dmitrieva, Head of the 'Special View' programme of the 'Art, Science and Sport' Charitable Foundation. 'Our aim was to prove that social theatre does not mean a second rank theatre — it can be highly professional art.'

The festival was attended by 250 specialists from various regions of Russia. Twelve socially inclusive productions were per-



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Dmitry Krestyankin's *Odyssey 2K19* with residents of children's homes in St. Petersburg was the winning production at the 'Special View' Forum-Festival.

Tatiana Medyukh, Director of the 'Inclusion' Centre: 'In an ideal world there would be no need for inclusive theatre. There would just be theatre without obstacles'.

formed and attended by more than a thousand people. The festival also included an extensive educational programme and most of the productions were live streamed on the Internet. A book entitled *Social Theatre in Russia* was published after the festival — a practical textbook for specialists who work in or are exploring this field.

'Empathy, respect for others, the right to feel that you are significant, to occupy a fitting place in society regardless of difficult circumstances — these are the main things that help people to be happy in today's world', says Dmitrieva. 'The forum-festival is an instrument for the formation of that outlook on the world.'

It is not known when the second 'Special View' Forum-Festival will be held, but the organizers have already planned a number of educational and theatrical events — in particular, a tour of Russia by Dmitry Krestyankin's *Odyssey 2K19*, the winning production in the festival.

It is too early to say whether projects like these will affect the level of tolerance in Russian society. However, the undoubted recognition of social and inclusive productions is an indisputable success for the activists in this topical field: directors and actors, organizers and sponsors, actors with special characteristics and people who look to social theatre for assistance. This recognition should be followed by state support, which is just as necessary. As Tatiana Medyukh, Director of the 'Inclusion' Centre, says: 'In an ideal world there would be no need for inclusive theatre. It would simply be a theatre with no obstacles — stairs to the auditorium or the stage, and without the entrenched opinion that 'there is no place here for others.' That ideal cannot be achieved, of course, but we have to strive towards it'.



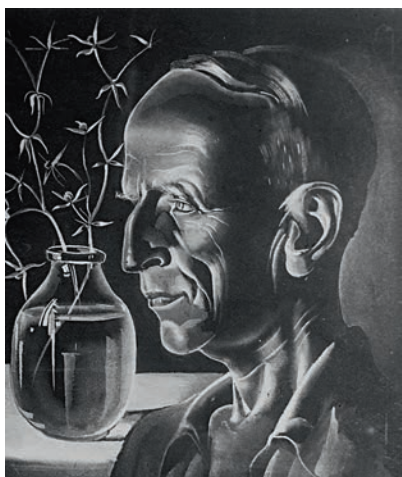


# The Childlike World of a Storyteller

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THE AKIMOV COMEDY THEATRE IN ST. PETERSBURG HAS CELEBRATED THE PUBLICATION OF *THE NAKED KING*,  
A COLLECTION OF EVGENY SHVARTS'S PLAYS (VITA NOVA PUBLISHING HOUSE)

Sergey ARKADIEV. Photos: Vita Nova archive, Galina Kozhemyachenko



The book contains scientifically processed texts of the best-known plays by Evgeny Shvarts (1896–1958): *The Naked King* (1933–1943), *The Snow Queen* (1938), *The Shadow* (1939–1940), *The Dragon* (1940–1943) and *An Ordinary Miracle* (1944–1954). It also includes the first publication of his early play *Just Imagine* (1930s). There is an opinion that the playwright created his own illusory world in order to avoid a dangerous confrontation with the reality around him. He portrayed that reality allegorically, though on the verge of risk, since he was unable to cope with it. However, the most important question raised by the author of these tales, staged at the Comedy Theatre by his friend and colleague Nikolay Akimov, is: can a human being oppose an inhuman system and retain a living soul in a soulless environment?

The extensive accompanying material by literature expert Elena Voskoboeva helps to answer this question. As always with Vita Nova, the book's design is eye-catching: a wide selection of authentic photographs, posters, documents and 46 original illustrations to Shvarts's plays produced especially for the publication by the artist Yury Shtapakov. The background to the themes of notional theatre action with pictogram characters is provided by the walls of old city buildings.

Let us think of this book — a work of art in its own right — as compensation to Evgeny Shvarts's descendants for the ordeals he suffered with his plays. For instance, *The Dragon* was published for the first time only after the playwright's death — in 1960...



## Cultural Layer

*Actress Elena FLORINSKAYA, now a member of staff at the Comedy Theatre's museum, shared her recollections of Evgeny Shvarts:*

'I was lucky enough to be born into a family of actors. My father Gleb Florinsky was one of the principal actors in Akimov's theatre and my mother was also an actress. So I was a theatre child, who as a baby was not taken to the theatre but carried there. I saw the first production of Shvarts's *The Shadow*, in which my father played Cesare Borgia. What an impression the scenes from this huge, beautiful play had on me, when the head of the Shadow is carried out on a tray and a charming princess suddenly appears from the back of an armchair...

Father used to get home quite late after performances and I would wait for him. My mother would indicate with her eyes that I was still awake. He would come to me and ask: "Elena, are you asleep?" I would reply with just my lips: "asleep". My parents told Evgeny Shvarts about this and he immediately put that "asleep" into the mouth of Christian the weaver in *The Naked King*. Shvarts, who was brilliant at thinking up words, phrases and dialogue, was very attentive to what people said, especially children.

I was about seven when I went with my father to see *Under the Limes of Berlin*, a play written by Evgeny Shvarts and Mikhail Zoschenko. The premiere was in August 1941. In the interval, Akimov rushed backstage, while Zoschenko, Shvarts and my father went down the marble staircase to smoke, and I went with them. Then Akimov joined us. Imagine that group of cheerful, witty people, so sad and depressed that even a child could sense it. They were depressed, of course, by the situation at the front. The play is super-optimistic, but events were turning out quite differently at that time. That play was performed only a few times before the theatre itself pulled it.

The theatre was evacuated at the end of December 1941. It was a difficult, circuitous route via Kopeysk, Sochi, Tbilisi, Sukhumi and Krasnovodsk, ending up in Stalinabad (now Dushanbe). Nikolay Akimov summoned Shvarts and his wife to Stalinabad. As Akimov said, if there was a job as "soul of the theatre," Evgeny Shvarts would be its rightful holder. However, since there was no such job, he appointed him head of the literary section. When Akimov went away on business, he left Shvarts in charge of the theatre. At first, this gave rise to sarcasm — this gentle, friendly and kind man was not suited to the role of manager. For example, when an actor was late for a rehearsal or forgot his lines, Shvarts would not shout at him or reprimand him, but, strange as it may seem, that reinforced discipline.

It took us a long time to travel by train from Stalinabad to Moscow in 1944. I would go into Shvarts's compartment every day. His wife Ekaterina was very beautiful, with huge eyes and very long hair, chestnut with a trace of ginger. I loved brushing her hair and she seemed to like it too, because she never hurried me. Shvarts would sit beside us and tell us something interesting. Then he would stand up and say in a serious voice: "Well, I'll go for a walk and won't disturb your work", when the only place he could go for a walk was along the corridor of the train.

When we had moved into a flat in Leningrad, Shvarts often visited us. He was friends with my parents, but he also liked talking to me and my sister Lirika, who was four and a half years older than me. He would ask how we were getting on and give us books with touching inscriptions. He also liked the fact that we had two dogs and a cat. Shvarts adored animals, but had had none of his own since the war. Trishka was a French miniature lapdog; we thought that her pup would be just as small, but we were deceived in the breed of the father and the pup turned out to be three times the size of its mother. We called her Pintik, because we originally thought she was male. (Remember, in *The Dragon* Lancelot asks the



Elena Florinskaya tells her story.

**Page 46:**  
Portrait of Evgeny Shvarts  
by Nikolay Akimov. 1942.

**Page 48:**  
Yury Shtapakov's illustrations  
to Evgeny Shvarts's play  
*The Snow Queen*.



## Cultural Layer



cat: "What's your name?" "Mashenka". " But I thought you were a male cat". "Yes I am, but people are sometimes not very observant".) Trishka was very delicate and never begged for food, but Pintik was fat and also charming. Shvarts loved feeding her and overfed her, but she would still come back to him for more. My mother and father would say: "Zhenya, can't you see that she can't eat any more?" He would reply: "Do with me what you will, but I can't resist that beseeching look!"

Our Kuzya was a talking cat. He meowed in such a way that it was obvious he wanted to explain something. He would go to the door and ask to be let out, then let in again. Shvarts, whose plays included talking animals, adored Kuzya and said to him: "Listen, I was sure that I invented you, but here you are".

My sister and I quickly grew out of our dresses but there was nothing to make new ones from, and the actress Lidia Sukharevskaya said to my mother: "Your girls are going around in blouses". Whenever Shvarts greeted me, he would smile and say: "Ah, the girl with the train!" When we were quite grown up, it turned out that my husband (when he was a boy) had lived in the same writers' house at 9 Griboyedov Canal as Shvarts. Lev used to tell me how he and the lads played football in the yard. When Shvarts came out, they stopped playing, knowing that he would come and question them and tell them something interesting — and he knew all the lads by name. They once heard that there was going to be an actors' party at the House of Writers that was renowned all over the city. Lev and his friend went there without any invitations or tickets in the hope of getting in. They were not admitted, of course, in spite of all their pleading. Just then, Shvarts, who was on the second or third floor, spotted them and told the ticket checker: "Those lads are with me, let them in". That was typical of Evgeny Shvarts — nobody else would have noticed them, remembered them or paid them any attention. It was only some boys, after all. For him it was always important that everyone was all right.