



Az Obrazcov Színház bábmúzeumáról megjelent album borítója



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THE PUPPET THEATRE IN RUSSIA

TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN PUPPET THEATRE OF PETRUSHKA

The Russian tradition of puppetry is deeply rooted in a history that stems from Old Slav myths, magic rituals, rites and festivities. The earliest puppets were unearthed by archaeologists in Moscow's Red Square at the subsoil layer dating from the 15th century, and were clay figurines with finger holes. Puppets of this type were used by *skomorokhs* (traveling medieval actors) in their shows.

The first documented evidence of puppetry in Russia comes from Adam Olearius (1636), a German diplomat, scholar and traveler. The street comedy he watched featured glove puppets. The play's protagonist encountered a variety of characters, whom he fought and defeated. One or two actors were engaged in this type of show, which later came to be known as the Petrushka comedy. In the absence of a stage, the puppeteers raised the dark cloth of their skirts or aprons above their heads.

The protagonist of the Russian traditional puppet comedy was Petrushka, a character similar to many other characters of the European street puppet shows (Pulcinella, Polichinelle, Punch, Don Cristobal, etc). He was a glove puppet in a red shirt with a red peaked cap, a huge beak of a nose and a gaping laughing mouth. He had the ever-present club in his hand, and his shrill voice was produced by the puppeteer who held a *pishchik* (squeaker) in his mouth.

The plots in the Petrushka comedy (the story of his desire to get married and settle down in a home of his own, of buying a horse from a Gypsy, falling off it and consulting a quack doctor, passing out, followed by a mock funeral) took shape under the influence of both European puppet theatre (mainly Italian), and traditional Russian outdoor games, including *Walking the Filly*, *Matchmaking*, *Mockery of Medicine-Taking* and others.

The Petrushka comedy was aggressively satiric; it both entertained and was a means of inner cleansing. Spectators imagined themselves in the puppets' circumstances and identified with their feelings. The audience's anger and its latent desires became embodied in the puppet characters. Thus the spectators released their aggressions, and the show turned into a ritual of sorts, a discharging device that helped realise suppressed desires, a cathartic experience. The sequence of events in the play was usually unchanged, but with time, new characters with new quips and tricks began to make their appearance. As Ivan Zaitsev, a distinguished puppeteer of the early 20th century so aptly put it, "everyone cripples Petrushka the way they like."

After the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, the new authorities tried to employ this folklore character to disseminate the totalitarian Communist ideology. There appeared plays about Petrushka the Red Army Soldier, Petty Retailer Petrushka, Petrushka the Atheist, etc. But in emerging as an element of the official culture, this character ceased to be the anarchist who always opposes any power. He lost the feature so appealing to his audiences. Only in the late 20th century with the change of ideological, cultural, economic and social conditions in Russia, did the much-loved old-style Petrushka shows reappear.

CHRISTMAS PUPPET SHOWS (*VERTEP*)

Christmas puppet shows also became a traditional element of the Russian culture. The *vertep* is one of the most mysterious phenomena of the past because it reflected the institutionalized form of medieval Christian ideas of the world and joined it with two other mainstream trends: the conventional ritualistic mystery theatre and the theatre of parody. The *vertep* unified the religious and mundane theatres;

the theatre of prophecy and that of rejected prophecies; the literary theatre and the theatre of comedy. This two-sided model embraced the two versions of the puppet theatre that existed without either aspect weakening the other.

The *vertep* stage-box is a two-storey miniature house open to the audience on one side. (There were also one-storey and three-storey *verteps*.) Performances were staged at Christmas.

The *vertep* shows usually had two almost totally independent parts. The first was a Biblical Nativity play with Jesus Christ, shepherds, the Magi and King Herod. Part Two was a folk comedy similar to the *Petrushka* play and was performed on the box's ground floor. The plot was adapted to the locality of the performance and to the style in which the local residents liked to make fun of other peoples' morals and manners, lifestyles and customs. The character most favoured in a given place was one of *Petrushka's* "cousins" (*Zaporozhets*, or *Cossack*). Church people and preachers promoted the *vertep* shows, assisting in their development and dissemination.

As is known, the puppet *verteps* in the western and south-western parts of the Russian Empire (Ukraine and Belarus) were popular in the 16th and 17th centuries. In time the *vertep* became part of a traditional culture that was free of any censorship; it then evolved into a secular entertainment with satirical *Petrushka*-type content. It migrated from Smolensk, Moscow and Nizhniy Novgorod to Russia's east – the Urals, Siberia and farther.

The *vertep* performances in Russia reached their peak of popularity in the 19th century. Russian writer Nikolai Polevoi (the first half of the 19th century) left this description of one such performance: "We would sit by the window until it got dark and it was decided to "let out the *vertep*". We would scream with delight the moment a knock came on the window shutter. When we asked "Who's there?" the answer was "Let us and the *vertep* in!" Then we would begin negotiating: "How many puppets do you have? How much do you charge?" They would say there were some 50 or 60 puppets, with 4 imps (devils were especially favoured by *vertep*

spectators), that they had a fiddle, and after the *vertep* there would be a comedy. When the *vertep* came in, we would put chairs in a semi-circle around the *vertep* which was placed on benches. The *vertep* doors were opened - and it all started! The tinsel, foil, the colours blazed; then the first puppet, the Sexton appeared. He lit small wax candles... And now it was the fiddle, the squeaky voices, and the Angels would appear kneeling before the manger, singing "Our Saviour, the world's Redeemer is born!"... Herod orders the murder of all infants, and suddenly we are the sufferers, too. And when Death comes for Herod as the singing continues, we find ourselves reflecting on our lives. We are terrified when hell opens up and red and black devils rise and dance by Herod's coffin on the upper storey. But our sides split with laughter when Herod's widow, after shedding bitter tears over her dead husband, consoles herself with the charms of a young general, and even takes to the dance floor with him. The comedy that followed the *vertep* was usually a pantomime by the puppeteers, and filled with very rude jokes."

After the 1917 Revolution the *vertep* shows gradually ceased to be performed, but were reintroduced in the 1980s, after the fall of the totalitarian regime when religious freedom was reinstalled.

RUSSIAN PUPPET THEATRE IN THE 17TH – 19TH CENTURIES

In the second half of the 17th century, puppets and masks began to be used in official performances such as *About David and Goliath*, *About Bacchus and Venus*, and others which were staged for Czar Alexei Mikhailovich (dubbed "The Quietist" for his exceptional piety). The puppets in the performances were life-sized representations of Bacchus, Goliath, Dragon and others.

In the late 17th century during the reign of Peter the Great, Western European puppeteers, including Yan Splavsky, "the comedian of the Hungarian descent", the Dane, Gottfried Kaulitz, and others brought their companies to Moscow. First tours of the puppeteers took place in 1700 under the auspices of Peter the Great, with one group staging performances in

Ukrainian cities while the other toured cities on the Volga banks as far as Astrakhan.

Foreign puppet companies (German and Italian) were immensely popular in Russia in the early 18th century. At the invitation of the Empress Anna Ioanovna, four Italian puppet companies, all companies of *commedia dell'arte* performers, began to perform in Moscow and St.Petersburg (1733). The owner of a German puppet theatre, Johann Siegmund, also had an immense influence on the Russian puppeteers (1733). In Moscow and St.Petersburg, he, his wife Elisaveta and a few actors staged performances of such plays as *About Adam and Eve*, *About Esther*, *About the Sacred Martyr Dorothy*, *About the Life and Death of Don Juan* and others. In 1742 Siegmund was granted an *exceptional privilege*, allowing him to “play and advertise his theatre and actors in Moscow, St.Petersburg, Narva, Riga, Revel and Vyborg, performing their comedies.”

Siegmund also received the right to build theatres. Later, these rights and privileges were given to other foreign puppeteers, too. Their repertoire was a mix of Anglo-German comedies (*Haupt-und-Staatsaktionen*), versions of knighthood novels, Biblical parables and farcical skits. There is even a report of performances of plays about Dr. Faustus. The performances were notable for the grandeur of the puppets’ costumes and the props.

Starting from the 1750s, automaton puppets, shadow theatre, different types of panoramas and “the optical theatre”, as well as “the firework theatre” that depicted allegoric figures of dragons, lions, eagles and so forth became popular in Russia. Fyodor Volkov, the founder of the Russian professional drama theatre, also paid attention to puppetry’s means of expression. With his own hands he made a “theatre consisting of puppets” (presumably for Emperor Peter III), using life-sized puppets and masks in his performance. During Emperor Peter’s coronation masquerade, *The Triumphant Minerva*, staged to honour Empress Yekaterina II, he also included street puppeteers.

In the 19th century, the puppet theatre becomes a normal part of Russian culture, regularly seen at festivities, at fair show-booths and even at celebrations

in private households. Along with Russian performers, Italian, French, German, Austrian and Romanian puppeteers staged their productions in big cities. Russian audiences became familiar with new puppetry techniques that used the latest developments in physics, mechanics and optics. Puppet plays were performed in the two major metropolitan cities, as well as in Sevastopol, Odessa, Kazan, Kharkov, Voronezh, Saratov and in many other cities of the Russian Empire.

In the 1840s, a Frenchman, M. Lemolt, organised the first Russian Children’s Puppet Theatre, although it usually staged its plays in French. Professional Russian puppetry dramaturgy began to evolve in the 19th century through the works of outstanding Russian writers and poets Vladimir Odoyevsky (*The Czar Maiden*), Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinsky (*The Chanted Forest*), and Vasili Kurochkin’s (*Lutonya the Prince*), among others. The art of puppetry came to interest some of the most important Russian writers, including Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Nikolai Nekrasov and Dmitry Grigorovich, to name but a few.

THEATRE OF THE RUSSIAN SILVER AGE ARTISTS AND POETS

Russian puppetry received a new impetus to its development in the early 20th century, in the period that came to be known as the *Silver Age* of Russian culture (‘Silver’ was an allusion to the exceptional spiritual richness of Russian arts of the day). Significantly, only artists and poets turned to the art of the puppet theatre, using it to develop ideas of *art moderne*.

The idea of the puppet, use of puppet metaphors and the production of puppet shows appealed to many artists at this time, from poets Andrei Bely and Konstantin Balmont, painters Alexander Benois and Nikolai Kalmakov to theatre directors Evgeny Vakhtangov, Nikolai Evreinov, among others.

In February of 1916 the play *Les forces de l’amour et de la magie* (based on an 18th century French fair comedy) was staged at the Petrograd home of the painter Alexander Gaush. This marked the opening of the Puppet Theatre of Yulia Slonimskaya and Pyotr Sazonov. The performance has remained in the history of Russian theatre as a model of *pure*

art, a Russian modern style of the early 20th century. The puppets used in that outstanding performance are carefully kept in Moscow's Museum at the Sergei Obraztsov Theatre; they are currently displayed at an exhibition in Toloso.

In 1917 Petrushka Theatre was opened in Moscow by the well-known artists Nina Simonovich-Efimova (1877–1948) and Ivan Efimov (1878–1958). Based on the expertise of Russian and West-European puppeteers (from France, Germany and Austria), the Efimovs enlarged the theatre, its repertoire, and updated puppetry techniques. Their closest associates included painters Valentin Serov and Vladimir Favorsky, philosopher Pavel Florensky and others. The Efimovs' family theatre performed for more than two decades, seriously influencing the aesthetics and professional skills of both Russian and world puppetry. Some of their best-known productions included *Ivan Krylov's Fables*, Andersen's *The Princess and the Pea*, Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, a composition based on Shakespeare's plays, and so forth.

Many theatre directors, stage designers and actors from different parts of Russia would visit the Efimovs' theatre to learn. It became a stepping stone for the formation of Russia's professional school of puppetry stagecraft.

THE MAKING OF THE SCHOOL OF PUPPETRY DIRECTORSHIP

Petrushka Theatre was established in 1924 by the director, actor, playwright, historian and puppetry theoretician, Evgeny Demmeni (1898–1969). It played an important role in the making of the professional puppet theatre in Russia. Demmeni started his career as an amateur actor in 1918. Like the Efimovs', his productions were based on books by Russian and foreign classic writers, including Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Nikolai Nekrasov, Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare, Jean-Baptiste Molière and Hans Sachs.

Compared to the shows staged by the *Silver Age* artists, his productions featured much higher theatrical and acting standards, greater dynamism of stage characters, profundity of images and serious acting. As an experimental director, Demmeni decided not

to use the traditional theatrical curtain in some of his productions. He was a bold experimenter, often changing the dimensions and scale of various objects on stage to introduce the spectator to the world seen through the eyes of his characters.

Demmeni was the first Russian director to use puppets in film and in a TV show. He also created the first Russian puppet museum. After the merger of his Petrushka Theatre and the Leningrad Marionette Theatre, he produced remarkable marionette shows: *Our Circus*, (1930), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1946), *Tom Thumb* (1946), Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1947), among others.

One of the first best-known Russian puppet theatre directors was Viktor Shvemberger (1892–1970). Upon graduation from the drama studio under the outstanding director Evgeny Vakhtangov, he founded two theatres, the Moscow City Puppet Theatre (1931) and the Moscow Region Puppet Theatre (1933). "The higher the skills of a stage actor, the easier it will be for him/her to become a good puppeteer," Shvemberger thought. His creative work culminated in original productions of Gogol's *Inspector General*, Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, and *Three Little Pigs* (a scenic fantasy based on the themes of Walt Disney's films).

The unique activities of the Efimovs, the directors Demmeni, Shvemberger and others became a catalyst for the creation of a network of large stationary state-run puppet theatres throughout Russia. The puppets, photos and bills of the productions of the first half of the 20th century in the current display will give the visitor a chance to appreciate the level of the period's stagecraft and theatrical culture.

SERGEI OBRAZTSOV AND HIS THEATRE

The next significant stage in the development of the Russian puppet theatre came in the work of Sergei Obraztsov (1901–1992). To a degree his creative activities synthesized the achievements of his predecessors. As an artist, actor and director he consolidated the previous discoveries of the *artist's theatre* and *director's theatre*, enriching these with his own expertise as an actor and craftsman. Thus he affected the course of development of 20th century puppet theatre

enormously both in Russia and abroad. Obraztsov's achievements were a milestone in the development of the 20th century puppet theatre the world over. Even as he brought to a close the period known as the *modern epoch*, he began the *post-modern period* in puppet theatre that followed it so closely in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries.

In a sense, the world puppet community realized what was referred to as the *Obraztsov phenomenon* quite suddenly. But Obraztsov appeared at exactly the most opportune moment to synthesise two opposing trends that had emerged in the then young professional art of puppetry. In 1931 he became the head of the State Central Puppet Theatre, established as a sort of "experimental laboratory" for the entire Russian professional puppetry community. With time it became the world's biggest puppet theatre. (In 1931 its staff consisted of only 12 people, whereas today it numbers 400). The new theatre was to do research embracing the entire field of the art of the puppet, assessing and consolidating its best elements. On the one hand, the theatre was to select from all the relevant creative efforts, and on the other, it was to assist this art form to define its identity.

In the 1960s Sergei Obraztsov made a statement that he could have voiced at the outset of his career. "If it is impossible to lay on the tiny shoulders of the puppet the same weight of honour, the same responsibility of being really wanted by people that rests on the shoulders of 'big art', then I do not want either to write about it or to be involved in any other way with this art form. Let it then turn into either children's play or an aesthetic eccentricity indulged in by adults."

The Obraztsov Theatre, as it would begin to be referred to later, did not engage in theatrical experiment as an end in itself; it studied the art of puppetry. It took stock of its potential, its range and the structure of its metaphors. Right from its first production, *Jim and Dollar*, and up until the early 1970s when this theatre became academically oriented, it continued to be the experimental laboratory that had been planned from the start. Its every production was innovative as in the days of the

avant-garde. Each production featured some discovery in the work of director or actor, and showcased original ideas, novel puppet designs and technologies, new literary sources, new scenography and accompanying music... The energy the Central Theatre generated fuelled other theatres of the country; its inspiration pulsed through them, gave them new strength and expanded the horizons of their creativity.

Again, the purpose of the new theatre was to do research into the entire field of the art of the puppet, and to avoid getting caught up in professional and theoretical debates. Its mission was to consider and consolidate all that was best and promising in supporting the art of the puppet to find its definition as a specific art form. One of Obraztsov's unusual passions was a great help in this – his passion as a collector. He hunted for rare things like paintings, puppets, masks, pieces of embroidery or music boxes. And he was also a "talent hunter."

It did not matter to Obraztsov whether people he met had a theatre, college or university degree, whether they were young or advanced in years. He hunted for talent – artistic, musical, and technical – or for the actor's gift. He educated his new acquaintances at his theatre, giving them the higher, Obraztsov-style education. He would choose the staff of his company as an experienced conductor would his orchestra. He had to hear their own original *sound*, uncover their capacity for being a member of the ensemble, know that each would perform their solos when the time was right. His was a glorious *collection* of talents like Semyon Samodur, Eva Sinelnikova, Zinovi Gerdt, Evgeny Speransky, all outstanding actors, the inimitable artists and puppet designers Boris Tuzlukov, Valentin Andrievich, a genius of a puppet maker Nikolai Solntsev, theatre theoretician Lenora Shpet, a multitude of now famous names. Each was a symbol of an epoch in acting, direction, scenography, puppet design or theatrical theory. Each played a *solo* in their respective periods in the life of the State Central Puppet Theatre.

Everything that had to do with puppetry had great significance for the young professional Russia's theatre

– Obraztsov's successes were shared by all the country's puppet theatres, whereas his failures warned them. Productions *At the Pike's Wish*, *Aladdin's Magic Lamp*, *The Night Before Christmas*, *The Devil's Windmill* and *The Divine Comedy* created at the Obraztsov laboratory were known all over the country. Having absorbed the expertise of the Efimovs, the company constructed a set of original rod puppets that later came to be known as *Russian rod puppets*. The Obraztsov productions became a sort of a textbook for the entire Russian puppet theatre, enabling a new artistic phenomenon in the 20th century to emerge in a fantastically brief period of 20 to 30 years.

By the mid-1950s when Russia's professional puppet theatre had taken shape both as a phenomenon and as a system, the need for the production of *standard* Obraztsov-style shows began to abate. New schools and laboratories emerged, researching both the potential of the puppet theatre as a whole, and the strengths of its individual trends and directions of development.

In the 1960s the Central Puppet Theatre was still significantly affecting the art of the puppet, but now not as a leader in the field of creativity but rather as one of the most authoritative links in the chain of professional theatres. Having designed a new architectural ensemble and erected a new building, the company pioneered a concept of theatrical architecture used by many theatres in the former USSR. This became the model for many puppet theatres built there in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Obraztsov Theatre's puppet museum that opened in 1937 became a trendsetter for dozens of theatres that began creating similar museums to save the documents about their history for future generations. The museum at Obraztsov's theatre was founded by Andrei Fedotov, an actor, director, playwright and researcher, who became its first managing director. First exhibits at the museum were the puppets and props of the Russian Petrushka Comedy and the show *Circus on the Stage* by Ivan Zaitsev, a great Russian puppeteer. Those and other rarities are displayed at the exhibition we are offering you.

In 1937 the Obraztsov Theatre organised the First USSR Competition for puppet theatres that was to be-

come the forerunner of regional, national and international festivals, including one of the biggest, the 1976 World Puppet Festival, held within the framework of the regular UNIMA congress and festival.

In a strict historic division, from 1931 to 1992, the Obraztsov Theatre had three development stages. The first one lasted from 1931 to 1936, when the company was a studio team, with rehearsals in a small room and performances at schools and courtyards. They travelled to those sites in a horse cart or a streetcar; later they used an automobile which they had turned into a travelling stage to show *Jim and Dollar*, *A Piggie in a Bath-Tub* and *The Brothers Montgolfier*.

The second period, from 1936 to 1970, was the most productive period for the now mature theatre. It had its own building in Moscow's Triumph Square, accommodating a puppet museum, a library and sophisticated workshops. There it produced its shows that became *The Golden Treasury* of the Russian theatre: *At the Pike's Wish*, *Aladdin's Magic Lamp*, *The Night Before Christmas*, *Deer-the-King*, *The Devil's Windmill*, *Buratino*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Don Juan* and *Unusual Concert*. (The last is registered in the Guinness Book of Records.)

In the third period, the *academic period*, from 1970 to the present, the theatre moved to a new building in Moscow's downtown. It now is more than a theatre: it is the world's biggest centre for the art of the puppet with the world's largest company of puppeteers. The building houses its famous puppet museum, along with its research methods centre, vast artistic workshops, and a huge collection of documents, manuscripts, photo and video materials, sketches and drawings of the puppets and props.

Each period was precious to both the Obraztsov Theatre and the entire puppetry community in the former Soviet Union.

The significance of the first period lay in how it evolved in the time of re-assessment and of forging new laws for the puppet theatre as an art form. In this time, it was necessary to work out original inexpensive stage design solutions, designs that were soon used by other theatres that did not have their own premises and stages.

The second period was the time of consolidating professionals and amateurs in a coherent community, working out an authoritative *brand* that acted as both support and protection. This was a time when the theatre began touring internationally. (The company toured in 97 countries.)

The *third period* of the Obraztsov Theatre has been its academic period. The formerly *leftist* avant-garde theatre has become the *right* wing of the art. But neither arts nor birds can fly with just one wing. It takes two wings to fly...

To commemorate Sergei Obraztsov's 100th birth anniversary, the 1st International Sergei Obraztsov Festival was held in Moscow in 2001. It was attended by about 60 puppet companies from all over the world. The top five Sergei Obraztsov awards were given to the distinguished puppeteers of the second half of the 20th century, including Philippe Genty (France), Jose Geal (Belgium), Henryk Jurkoski (Poland), Valeri Volkhovskiy (Russia), Albrecht Rozer (Germany). The biannual Sergei Obraztsov Festival is now one of the biggest puppet events in Russia.

At present two directors work at the Central Puppet Theatre: Yekaterina Obraztsova and Andrei Dennikov. They do research in a number of directions. Obraztsova's productions include *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *B'er Rabbit*, *The Night Before Christmas* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Her aim is to develop "the Sergei Obraztsov" tradition. By contrast, Dennikov's shows, such as Pushkin's *Little Tragedies*, *Rigoletto* and *Carmen*, chart his way in the realm of synthetic arts, combining elements of opera, ballet and drama in his productions. The company often invites distinguished directors and designers from different Russian theatres.

The greater part of Window to Russian Puppetry displays has been contributed by the Puppet Museum of the Obraztsov State Central Puppet Theatre.

MIKHAIL KOROLEV AND HIS DISCIPLES

Starting from the 1960s, Russian puppetry has developed and extended its artistic potential by using expressive means from related theatre arts, such as masks, pantomime, ballet and dramatic arts. Again, as 300 years earlier, the trend to synthesize

visual arts has been evident. One of the first Russian puppeteers to turn the puppet theatre in this direction was Boris Ablynin, founder of the Moscow theatre-studio, The Skylark. The theatre operated for only 5 years, but Ablynin's productions, in particular Anouilh's *The Skylark*, led the way and became the forerunner of many theatrical breakthroughs of the nascent *post-modern* styles of the second half of the 20th century.

Many followers of this trend were trained and guided by Mikhail Korolev (1913–1983), a theatre director and professor at the State Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography (at present, The St.Petersburg Theatre Academy).

Korolev's artistic career is first and foremost linked to the Bolshoi (Big) Puppet Theatre and Theatre Institute (in former Leningrad) where he chaired the Puppetry Department. The productions Korolev staged (*In the Golden Paradise*, *The 12 Chairs*, *The Charmer Galatea*, *The Naked King* and others) became a major milestone in the history of the Russian puppet theatre. Although Korolev won many awards at national and international puppet festivals, his main strength was undoubtedly his talent as a theatrical pedagogue.

In 1959 for the first time in Russia, Mikhail Korolev launched a curriculum of professional training for puppeteers, directors and artists at the Leningrad Theatre Institute. The founder and head of the Department of Puppetry for more than 20 years, Korolev trained many talented, highly professional directors and actors. His students work in virtually every puppet theatre of Russia and the former USSR, and are themselves now regarded grand masters of the art of puppetry. No doubt, in the last 30 or so years of the 20th century, the Russian puppet theatre, especially in provinces, developed under an active creative influence of Korolev's followers. All Russian institutions of theatrical higher education with departments of puppetry are in essence *affiliations* of Korolev's Leningrad School because his disciples and their disciples are now the heads of their departments, chairs and faculties. The professionals they have reared are now among the directors of Russia's leading puppet theatres

and have won the most prestigious theatre awards. In 2008 the Theatre Union of the Russian Federation (VTO) established the annual Mikhail Korolev Awards in the categories: "For the Successes in Mastering the Acting Profession" and "For the Successes in the Rearing of Next-Generation Actors." Korolev's disciples became the leaders of what has become to be known as "the Ural zone", a phenomenal creative trend of Russian puppetry.

URAL ZONE

This term is used by Russian theatre researchers to denote a period in the 1970s-1980s of unusual daring and radical search for new ideas, aesthetics and changes in the artistic language of the Soviet puppetry. The region, where these changes were most evident gave its name to the period. The theatres in the cities in the Urals and Siberia became sources of new creative ideas in Russian puppetry. As they spread, this became the epitome of spiritual thinking for an entire generation of young creative puppeteers.

The arts in the USSR in the 1970s were still closely watched by state authorities, so some of the graduates of Mikhail Korolev's Puppetry Department decided to work in places removed from the two capitals in hopes that local authorities would not keep such a strict eye on their work. They were right. As provincial theatre directors, they had relative freedom to work on creating their own new theatre, different from the State Academic Central Puppet Theatre, the conventionally recognised standard-setter. The search for a new aesthetic that was capable of expressing the ideas of the dissident movement found fertile soil. Many young creative souls, talented workers, trained in other professional schools, were attracted to Russia's remote regions.

The *Ural Zone* directors did not hesitate to take the actor from behind the folding screen, to build on the relationship between puppeteer and puppet, and to extend the significance and the content of this trope. They were brave defendants of their views in the acute debates. They staged productions that clashed

with the officially recognised culture of the period and they were courageous in debating the ideology of the totalitarian power.

It was in that time that director Viktor Shraiman and stage designer Mark Bornshtein founded their new theatre Buratino in Magnitogorsk, when Valery Volkhovsky and Elena Lutsenko worked in Chelyabinsk, Evgeny Gimelfarb and Sergei Stolyarov worked in Barnaul, Lyubov Petrova and Roman Vinderman in Tomsk where they died, Andrei Tuchkov in Tyumen, directors Mikhail Khusid and Boris Ponizovsky in Kurgan, director Vladimir Shtein and the stage designer Marina Gribanova in Ufa, and Igor and Anna Ignatievs in Perm.

The foremost showcases for new ideas and discoveries made by these puppeteers working beyond the Urals were the famous theatre festivals. They were organised and founded by the All-Russian Theatre Society (currently the RF Theatre Union) together with the RF Ministry of Culture. Festival programmes included heated daily discussions of the shows involving artists, local and metropolitan critics. These discussions reflected the on-going concerns of intellectuals about the times, about the lives they lived and about their place in society. Each festival was an original creative *laboratory* where ideas for new productions brewed and each festival uncovered (or rather declared) a new aesthetic breakthrough that caused a chain reaction of creative thinking.

Starting from the 1980s, the beginning of what was known as *perestroika* (the restructuring) of the state machine, ideas and the aesthetic fundamentals that took shape in the period known as the *Ural Zone* lost their focus; the group went down into history alongside the time that had brought it forth. Nevertheless, the *creative laboratory* of puppetry directors and designers under Irina Uvarova and under the Department of Theatres for children and youth of the RF Theatre Union that was established at the time when Urals festivals were held continued to be active and remained a tangible echo of those years. The results of her annual seminars are published in special bulletins of the Department. Until recently, the magazine *Kukart* edited by Irina

Uvarova, was published very occasionally, as a sort of reflection of the light from the *Ural Zone*.

The *Ural Zone* was the subject matter of many articles and publications. Many things taking place in present-day puppet theatre can be seen in the prism of that colourful period. No videos of its productions have survived, but it should be acknowledged that even a perfect video would not represent the degree of social and creative resonance this artistic phenomenon caused then, when “the iron curtain” separated us from the rest of the world. When this “curtain” was destroyed along with *perestroika*, revamping of the state structure, it became clear that the avant-garde of that period was more in harmony with the European arts of its time than we had known.

VORONEZH STATE PUPPET THEATRE SHUUT (JESTER)

The city of Voronezh is one of southern Russia's biggest historical, industrial and cultural centres. The first page of the history of its puppet theatre was written at the Voronezh State University, where professor Nikolai Bezzubtsev established his Petrushka Theatre in 1925. Students and lecturers used puppets to stage campus skits and other productions. Amateur actors staged the opera, *The Puppet Bouquet*, Nikolai Gogol's *The Marriage*, Ivan Krylov's fables, and tales by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin. The founders of Voronezh puppet theatre included actors Taisia Avgustina, Pyotr Grigorov and Fyodor Balashov, among others.

In the 1960s and '70s, the company began combining puppets from different systems and of differing designs with the expressive possibilities of related art forms. The best productions of that period include *The Divine Comedy*, a fantasy based on cartoons by Jean Effel, and *The Military Secret*, a sorrowful parable of episodes from World War I. With Igor Lukin as its artistic director, the company lived a life full of creativity. In 1984 it moved into a new building with spacious foyers, a fully equipped stage and a comfortable auditorium.

In 1987, the outstanding director Valery nVolkhovsky (1938–2003) took the helm of the company. He and

the designer Elena Lutsenko had moved to Voronezh from Chelyabinsk, where Volkhovsky had acted as artistic director from 1977 to 1987. He staged his best productions in collaboration with her.

While in Chelyainsk, Volkhovsky had gathered around him a brilliant ensemble of actors, including Viktor Golovanov, Alexander Borok, Valentina Shiryayeva, Alla Antipova, Viacheslav Cherniavsky, Arina Zharikova, to mention but a few. He believed that “theatre is a way to get better, purer of soul, aesthetically richer, to learn to sense wings behind one's back and to teach each others to fly.” He staged diverse shows such as Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, Nikolai Gogol's bitter satire (*Dead Souls*) and some based on folklore (*The Straw Lark*).

Volkhovsky and Lutsenko's arrival at the Voronezh puppet theatre also signified the beginning of a new artistic aesthetic and a search for modern solutions. The philosophical orientation of the productions for adult audiences such as *The Lake Boy*, *This Is a Human*, *Nightingale and the Emperor*, *From the Life of Insects*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Hercules and the Augean Stables* and others provoked widespread reflection. This theatre eventually became a leading Russian puppet theatre. Along with these shows for adults, the company has a wide repertoire of productions for children among which were: *The Legend of a Kind Heart*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Adventures of Neznaika*, *My Golden Chicken*, and *Pinocchio*.

The theatre owes much to the stage and puppet designers Elena Lutsenko and Alexander Yechein. Both graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography (later – the St.Petersburg Theatre Arts Academy), and they both worked with Valery Volkhovsky, first in Chelyabinsk then in Voronezh.

Elena Lutsenko is a famed master of artistic grotesquery. Hers is a strikingly organic combination of the tragic and the ridiculous, the lofty and the base. She creates an inimitable mix of scenic images in what is a genuine puppet performance. Her puppets and sets (Lutsenko is a distinguished puppet maker) in *Dead Souls*, *Nightingale and the Emperor*, *The Lake*

Boy and other productions are diverse, enticing and invite the spectator into realms of fantasy.

The same is true of the other Voronezh theatre artist, Alexander Yechein who is credited with more than 60 productions including Andersen's *The Soldier and The Witch*, *The Trial of Jeanne d' Arc*, *The Intricate Hidalgo Don Quixote*, productions that were always impeccable and inspired. Yechein is a brilliant scenographer, capable of creating new scenic spaces, and a fine puppet maker who creates many new characters, each with its own gamut of multi-faceted traits. His productions are always investigative. In each new play, he identifies fully with the main theme; he examines the artistic possibilities, the epoch and its material culture thoroughly in order to create his own stage characters.

At present the Voronezh puppet theatre is well known in both Russia and abroad. It has won top awards at many international festivals in Bulgaria, Poland, Germany, France, Switzerland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The theatre has started its own project, the puppetry festival *Posidelki* (The Village Gossip Party).

The theatre has established a puppet museum. The distinguished St.Petersburg director and playwright Alexander Veselov (1952–1996) began to form the collection with later entries consisting of the puppets and sets of the theatre's productions.

YEKATERINBURG MUNICIPAL PUPPET THEATRE

The path of further development in Russian puppetry is graphically demonstrated by the exhibit and performance staged by the Yekaterinburg Municipal Puppet Theatre.

Yekaterinburg is a large Russian city in the mid-Urals, and has every right to be considered a cultural centre of the Urals region of the Russian Federation. Its puppet theatre was founded on November 6, 1932. In 1964, it moved into a permanent facility with two stages and two halls seating 286 and 80. Since 1966, it has been a collective member of UNIMA. Distinguished specialists work at the production workshops, devising puppets, sets and props. Company staff mainly includes the graduates of the Yekaterinburg Theatre Institute.

The theatre has a long history of creative work with many well-known directors, artists and actors. One of them is Roman Vinderman, a disciple of Mikhail Korolev. The aesthetics of his productions and stage creations gravitate towards the combination of expressive devices typical of the period of the *new wave* in the late 1990s. The director has not shied away from producing plays based on *big* literature. He has staged Yaroslav Hašek's *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk*, Vladimir Mayakovsky's *The Bath House*, and the romantic tragedy of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

The puppets used in Vinderman's productions are a departure from traditional shapes; while the folding screens and elements of the sets are almost quaint, puppeteers make their entry from behind the sets, and at times turn into stage actors, mimes and acrobats.

In 1988 Vladimir Garanin, a director of the new generation, became the head of the theatre. Garanin is an artist with a complex and profound inner world, who gravitates towards non-traditional solutions in the style of the *theatre of poetry*. If Valery Volkhovsky, Viktor Shraiman and Roman Vinderman, also Mikhail Korolev's disciples, tended to work on plays with undisguised social themes, the next generation of *post-modern* artists explored the territory of poetic theatre. Garanin's productions of Sergei Kozlov's *Down By the Green Ocean Hills*, Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* (sets and puppets by A. Efimov), 2001 and the parable *The Light of Triumph* (sets and puppets by A.Shubin) staged in 2000, made the Yekaterinburg theatre move along a new path. Unfortunately, Vladimir Garanin's life was too short, but his strength was a surprisingly subtle manner of working out a new spiritual character for the theatre which prepared the company for its continued development.

From 2002 to 2005 Alexander Borok headed the theatre; he became the creative leader whose activities added new expressive means to the theatre's artistic metaphors. He and Sergei Plotov co-authored the productions *Pictures from an Exhibition* (sets and puppets by A.Efimov) and *Don Juan* (sets and puppets: Yu.Selavri) that became the company's unconditionally

acclaimed success. Borok's renderings continue to enrapture the audiences with their surprising originality. His *The Hamlet* (using the word *hamlet* as "a small village") combines a grotesque, temperamental and witty parody with philosophical drama. Andrei Efimov acts as the protagonist, making his Hamlet an unusual, new and profound rendition of this classic figure.

Andrei Efimov has been with the theatre since 1983. He is a man of many talents, a unique actor, a remarkable painter, a director with original ideas and a skilled puppet designer. In 1997 Efimov became the first Yekaterinburg actor to win the Russian national prize *The Golden Mask* for best stage and puppet designer. His productions *The Emerald City of Oz*, *Illusion Theatre*, *The Nightingale* and *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* became real gems in the company's repertoire. Andrei Efimov has made 60 puppets of his own designs, and each is a genuine masterpiece.

At present the Yekaterinburg Theatre, with its wide repertoire of productions in different genres and styles, is a family gathering place. It upholds its standards, relying on quality dramaturgy, high professionalism and elevated theatrical culture. Its productions have been awarded awards from many important Russian and international festivals. Beginning in 2002, every other year the theatre has held its own international biennale, *Petrushka the Great*. The main festival prize is a bronze figurine named "Petrushka the Great" made by sculptor Boris Ryzhov from a sketch by Andrei Efimov.

In 2004 the theatre opened *Petrushka's House*, a puppet museum started by the staff stage designer Yulia Selavri. Adult visitors enjoy seeing their once favoured puppet characters. The museum's archive is a repository of photos, documents and publications on the theatre's history. With 75 years of experience to its credit, it is an heir to the best of traditions of the Russian puppetry. Thus the Yekaterinburg company has pursued a glorious path of development, and found its unique identity.

AND MANY OTHERS...

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the structure of the art of puppetry in Russia changed. Canons of the

traditional theatre were renewed. Viktor Novatsky (1929–2003), an outstanding puppetry theoretician, folklorist, producer and playwright, had a significant role in this transformation. And as a result, street performances can again be seen during holidays, at festivities, at fairs and during the Christmas festivals. After decades of absence, the *verteps* are held again.

The practice of setting up and continuing performances in non-governmental, private theatres is a new phenomenon. The Moscow family theatre *Teni* (The Shadow) founded by the artist, Ilya Eppelbaum and the puppet theatre actress, Maya Krasnopolskaya was one of the first such theatres. Like the Efimovs' theatre in early 20th century, *The Teni* became one of the most advanced puppet theatres in Russia during the late 20th and the early 21st centuries. It follows an overtly experimental direction, staging satirical and lyrical plays and sometimes including interactive ones.

In the same way, other theatres now known in both Russia and elsewhere came into being. These include the Moscow theatre of Children's Books, *Magic Lamp*, established by the director Vladimir Shtein and designer Marina Gribanova, the St.Petersburg theatres *Puppet House*, *Puppet Format*, *Brodiachaya Sobachka* (The Mutt), *Potudan*, and others. Some of them soon acquired the status of "municipal theatres."

Directors, stage and puppet designers and puppeteers also work fruitfully in the established state theatres, too. They are Dmitry Lokhov (Arkhangelsk), Boris Salamchev (Omsk), Ruslan Kudashov, Igor Ignatiev, Nikolai Borovkov, Sergei Stolyarov (St.Petersburg), Valery Shadsky (Ryazan), Stanislav Zhelezkin (Mityshchi), Anatoli Tuchkov (Krasnodar), Gennadi Shugurov (Saratov), Vladimir Biryukov (Penza), Vladimir Kuprin, Viacheslav Borisov (Yaroslavl), Valeri Bugaiov (Kursk), Alexander and Marina Yarilovs (Orenburg), and many others. Each one is a full-fledged creator capable of staging inimitable original productions.

Having gone through a century-long history, moving forward on the basis of traditions of Russian culture and folklore, the Russian professional puppet theatre has incorporated the best achievements of

both West European arts and Oriental theatrical culture. It has stepped into the 21st century enriched by the expertise of the leading figures of Russian and global puppetry and has created its own professional school to train new talent capable of shaping the future.

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Russian Puppetry Researchers

Research on the history and theory of the puppet theatre began to be published in the late 1890s. The article *The Puppet Theatre in Russia* (1895) by Vladimir Peretz, an outstanding historian of the Russian theatre, marked the beginning of such research. In it, the scholar described how puppet theatre emerged in Russia.

Yulia Slonimskaya (1884–1972) made a great contribution to the research of the history of puppetry. Her article, *The Marionette*, with its detailed analysis remains significant for theoreticians and practitioners of puppetry today.

Ethnographer Pyotr Bogatyriov (1893–1971), one of the researchers of puppetry semiotics, a folklorist, linguist and ethnographer, was the first scholar to get interested in puppetry as a system of signs, summarizing his views in the article *On the Interaction of the Two Close Semiotic Systems: the Theatre of the Puppet and the Theatre of a Live Actor*. Throughout his life Andrei Fedotov (1900–963), founder of the Puppet Museum at the Obraztsov Theatre, studied puppet theatre. His articles and books on the subject have not lost their importance even now.

Lenora Shpet (1904–1976), one of those who initiated the establishment of Russian children's theatres, has made significant contributions, summarizing the theory and specific history of puppetry.

Natalia Smirnova (1929–1976), a theatre historian and theoretician, scrutinized the laws and problems of continuity in different trends of puppetry. Some of the results of her investigations are presented in the book, *The Art of the Playing Puppets*.

The outstanding Russian philologist and theatre critic, Evgeny Kalmanovsky (1927–1994) also studied puppetry, dramaturgy and direction. He trained a group of talented theatre critics working in the

1970s–1980s, and was a significant influence on the formation of the *Ural Zone*.

Anna Nekrylova, a folklorist, philologist and theatre critic, has written numerous books and articles about traditional Russian puppet theatre. These include *The Russian Folk City Holidays*, *The Scenic Specificity of the Traditional Russian Petrushka Puppet Theatre*, *The Law of Contrast in the Poetic Language of the Russian Folk Puppet Theatre of Petrushka*, and others.

Anatoli Kulish, a theatre historian, wrote *The 19th Century Russian Puppet Theatre*, which contains a major collection of documents and reminiscences about the art of this period.

The work of Inna Solomonik, ethnographer and theatre historian, should also be mentioned among the work of important Russian researchers. She was predominantly concerned with studying the Oriental puppet theatre. Her book *The Puppets Come out on the Stage* was very popular. In it she wrote about the well-known traditional and professional puppet theatres of Italy, France, Belgium, the USA and other countries.

Irina Zharovtseva (1931–2003), a theatre critic and translator, is a well-known name in Russia and elsewhere. Her activities as General Secretary of the Russian UNIMA Centre were a great contribution to the integration of Russian puppeteers into the global "puppet community."

Irina Uvarova, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Kukart*, a culturologist and artist, has had a significant influence on the aesthetics of the present-day Russian puppet theatre through her articles, books and tutelage of theatre directors and designers.

Boris Goldovsky, one of the managers of the Sergei Obraztsov Theatre, has written a number of articles and books on the history and dramaturgy of the Russian puppet theatre as well as a comprehensive encyclopaedia *The Puppets*.

Olga Polyakova studies issues of the scenography of the puppet theatre. Anna Ivanova (*Theatre of Puppets. The Content of Conventional Technological Systems*) and Natalia Raitarovskaya (*Marionette in the History of the Russian Puppet Theatre*) have investigated specific aspects of the puppet theatre

and the linkage of its scenography with the technology of theatrical puppets.

The articles and presentations of Olga Glazunova, Alexei Goncharenko, Arina Shepeleva and other leading Russian theatre critics provide ample evidence of the advancement of the modern Russian school of theatrical studies.

Periodicals

Several puppetry magazines are published in Russia, including **Kukart** (est.1989, editor-in-chief: Irina Uvarova), and **Teatr Chudes** (Theatre of Magic), published by the Sergei Obraztsov Foundation (est.2000, editor-in-chief: Nina Monova). The latter carries information about the work of Russian and foreign puppeteers, scripts of plays, a section on puppet technology, etc. The presidents of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus UNIMA centres sit on the Editorial Board.

Professional Puppetry Schools

Secondary and higher educational institutions in St.Petersburg, Moscow, Yaroslavl, Nizhniy Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Voronezh, Saratov, Novosibirsk and Omsk give professional training to puppeteers, directors and designers. Leading Russian masters act as instructors, sharing their knowledge and expertise with the younger generation.

Amateur groups, especially those at schools and Houses of Children's Creative Work, are also interested in the art of puppetry. Amateur children's companies participate in many competitions and festivals.

Public Organisations

Activities of puppet theatres in Russia are coordinated by the **Department of Children's and Youth Theatres at the Theatre Union of the Russian Federation** (the organisation of more than 100 years of standing uniting all theatre workers in Russia) and the **Russian UNIMA Centre**.

The **Department of Children's and Youth Theatres** aims at promoting theatre activities, ensuring their development and professional growth (including puppet theatres). It organises puppetry festivals, seminars, meetings with creative workers and workshops. The best productions are nominated for various prizes and are recommended to be included in the programmes of festivals. For many years Olga Glazunova did much as the chief of this department.

Sergei Obraztsov and Valeri Volkhovskiy served as **Russian UNIMA Centre** chairmen in their day. At present, this position is held by Valery Shadsky, the artistic director of the Ryazan Puppet Theatre. General Secretary of the Centre is Elena Tochilko. Nina Monova, head of the Literary Department of the Sergei Obraztsov Theatre, became the head of the UNIMA European Commission in 2008. The Russian UNIMA Centre obtains and disseminates information about meetings, festivals, technical instruction, technologies, and premieres in the world of puppetry among all professionals and amateur puppeteers. The Russian UNIMA Centre also takes part in organising and putting on festivals.

The Centre for the Maintenance and Development of Sergei Obraztsov's Artistic Heritage (former Sergei Obraztsov Foundation established in 1998) has significantly contributed to the development of the Russian puppetry in the last decade. The Centre made a contribution in the creation of a monument to Sergei Obraztsov in Moscow, opened the museum in his apartment, published a number of books and shot films about the art of the puppetry. Boris Goldovsky is president of the Centre.

Puppet festivals in Russia

Puppet festivals are held in many parts of Russia. To give the reader an idea of their geography, we give you a list of the biggest international festivals our colleagues abroad can participate in: