

Students During Graduation Theater Performance



This photograph was taken in Leningrad in 1946 by one of the students of our Theatrical College. Here you can see me playing Marina (a nurse) in the graduation theater performance *Uncle Vanya* by Chekhov. [Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich (1860-1904): Russian short-story writer and dramatist. His success as a dramatist was assured when the Moscow Art Theater took his works and staged great productions of his masterpieces, such as *Uncle Vanya* or *The Three Sisters*.] Here I'll tell you how I became an actress. I'll start ab ovo.

Starting from my 1st class I appeared on school stage every holiday: I recited poetry, danced, and sang songs. At that time beggars went from house to house singing doleful romances. Their texts used to be only for grown-ups, but I remembered them immediately and copied with pleasure. I even derived benefit from it. There was a bakery next door to us in a basement, where they baked wafers. They used to sell wafers filled with ice cream. Both ice-cream and wafers were absolutely prohibitive delicacy for us. The only thing we could afford were cuttings of wafers which they sold at a very low price. It was necessary to come with a clean pillowcase to get those cuttings. Well, workers of that bakery adored me, because I sang and danced for them. They called me a little Gipsy and gave me a lot of wafer cuttings. All children from our house considered it to be great success to go for wafers together with me. The only thing that confused me was laughing of my spectators: I sang so touching songs... Mum knew about my success and decided to develop my abilities and found children's drama school for me. Children aged from 12 till 16 studied there. They had 3 departments: for musicians, singers, and theater fans. I entered theatrical one. They taught us very well: I mastered basics of my future profession. They also gave us some food. There I heard strange words 'Today you will have an omelette.' I had no idea about it, and thought that it was a sort of punishment. But they brought a huge frying pan with fried eggs. I brought a piece of it to Mum. She turned away from me to the window and began crying. I was a little girl, but I understood at once, why she was crying. I heard her unvoiced words 'I did not want my children to have such childhood.' At the studio I have been studying for three years.

I finished my school, but still was interested in theatre and in everything connected with it. I had no money to buy tickets. But I kept in touch with my former friends of drama school, and they told me all theatrical news. That was the way I got to know about admission to the studio at the Theatre for Young Spectators. [State Theatre for Young Spectators in St. Petersburg (Leningrad) is one of the oldest children's theatres of Russia. It was founded in 1922.] The studio prepared actors, mainly for children's theatres. I went there to participate in casting. And you remember that I was very short, slim, and big-nosed. They considered me to be apt for travesty. They gave me scholarship of 16 rubles, and I gave up my job. Simultaneously I entered a studio for adults (Sladkopevtsev, an actor was its director). [Vladimir Sladkopevtsev, an actor was born in 1876 and died in 1957.]

They got to know about it in the studio at the Theater for Young Spectators. They did not like it - that is why I had to leave the studio. Then I decided to enter Theatrical College. [The Leningrad College of Theater, Music and Cinematography (nowadays Theatrical Academy) was founded in 1918 as School of Actor's Skill.] For some reason it seemed to me that I was too young for that purpose. That was why I forged my age in the passport without hesitation. At the College there was large entry. Before the entrance examinations entrants had to pass through creative selection (it consisted of 3 tests). I happily reached the third test, but at that moment they found out that I had forged my passport and immediately kicked me out. So I got nothing and looked like a fool.