

Vera Sonina Playing One Of Her Roles



This photograph was taken in 1972 in Leningrad. It shows me playing duchess Olivares in Don Carlos by Schiller. [Schiller, Friedrich (1759-1805): German Romantic playwright. His first major poetic drama, Don Carlos (1787), helped to establish blank verse as the recognized medium of German drama.] It was in the Leningrad Theater for Young Spectators. One of my colleagues took this photo at the backstage.

In 1944 working in the hospital in Samarkand, I received a letter from the Leningrad Theatrical College (from Tomsk, where the College had been evacuated). Serebryakov, director of the College wrote to our hospital that Sonina Vera Markovna, a teacher of physical culture must leave for Tomsk (to the College). I took that letter and went to the military registration and enlistment office again. I said 'Either you send me to the front line or I go to Tomsk.' - 'Front line is not interested in women', they answered. - 'Go to your College.' It happened in 1944. I reached Tomsk and began to study at the Theatrical College (they did not stop studies in evacuation). I entered the second course. Later together with my College we moved to Novosibirsk, and then (already almost at the end of war) returned to Leningrad. We celebrated Victory Day already in Leningrad.

Our apartment appeared to be occupied, that was why they placed at my disposal only one room there. And I told you already that our apartment was awful: very damp, moisture oozed directly from walls. Suddenly I was suggested to move to another room in our house, but on the second floor. The room was very sunny. It was about 7 square meters, very long, like a gut. So I moved there. In my tiny room there lived my friends (whose living conditions were even worse than that of mine) from the College, and later from the Theatre. I continued to study. I graduated from the

College in 1949 and started working in the Theatre for Young Spectators. A. Bryantsev was its director. [Alexander Bryantsev (1883-1961) - founder, actor, and director of the Theater for Young Spectators.] He was a remarkable person, talented and brave. I'll tell you about his courage a little bit later. In the Theatre for Young Spectators I worked about 27 years. That period was very happy for me. A. Raykin himself invited me to his theater. [Arkady Raykin (1911-1987) - a famous Russian actor, master of dramatic identification, a compere, performer of monologues, feuilletons, sketches.] But I could not leave Bryantsev. I admired him. He used to bring to perfection even the most insignificant role in a crowd scene. He made no distinction between actors; all of them were equally dear and interesting to him. Here I'll tell you a story, which shows his character much better than my words. In the Theatre for Young Spectators there were 2 remarkable actors: Teykh and Freindlich. They were Germans. And during the war the Theatre was in evacuation. At the end of the war Leningrad theatres began to come back from evacuation. But the Theatre for Young Spectators was not allowed to come back. Authorities said that its staff could come, but without Teykh and Freindlich: after the end of the war Leningrad needed no Germans. But Bryantsev himself went to Moscow. Here you have to take into consideration that it was rather dangerous to intercede for Germans at that time! I do not know what higher echelons Bryantsev visited in Moscow, what words he found, but the Theatre was allowed to return to its native city. To tell the truth, Friendlich immediately left for Alexandrinsky Theatre, expressing no thanks to Bryantsev. The point was that Alexandrinsky Theatre had academic status and salaries were higher there. But Teykh said 'While Bryantsev is alive, I will not leave his theatre.'