CULTURAL EXCHANGE: THE ROLE OF STANISLAVSKY AND THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE'S 1923 AND1924 AMERICAN TOURS

Cassandra M. Brooks, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Olga Velikanova, Major Professor
Richard Golden, Committee Member
Guy Chet, Committee Member
Richard B. McCaslin, Chair of the Department of History
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School

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The following is a historical analysis on the Moscow Art Theatre's (MAT) tours to the United States in 1923 and 1924, and the developments and changes that occurred in Russian and American theatre cultures as a result of those visits. Konstantin Stanislavsky, the MAT's co-founder and director, developed the System as a new tool used to help train actors—it provided techniques employed to develop their craft and get into character. This would drastically change modern acting in Russia, the United States and throughout the world. The MAT's first (January 2, 1923 – June 7, 1923) and second (November 23, 1923 – May 24, 1924) tours provided a vehicle for the transmission of the System. In addition, the tour itself impacted the culture of the countries involved. Thus far, the implications of the 1923 and 1924 tours have been ignored by the historians, and have mostly been briefly discussed by the theatre professionals. This thesis fills the gap in historical knowledge.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

To understand and gain a "clearer picture of Russian life, ways of thinking, and inner problems" one cannot omit art and entertainment. The problems of everyday life surface from the art and the artist in ways, and with clarity, that interviewing officials can never provide.[1] With this in mind, an examination of Russian theatre and its impacts are very important if we are to understand early Soviet history and culture. Since Peter the Great, and especially under Catherine the Great, the Russian theatre has played a pivotal role in society, as well as provided a looking glass into Russian and Soviet life. By examining the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), in particular their American tours, and the impact of Konstantin Stanislavsky, a greater understanding of Russian culture as a whole and its international impact can be gained; in addition, this examination provides insight on American culture and the significances of the cultural exchange between the Russian actors and American audiences and students and, in general, between two countries.

This work documents the MAT's progress in attainting world acclaim, a feat which provided the opportunity for a reception of its message, in addition to the cultural changes, in both Russia and the United States, which took place because of its success. Moreover, one of the MAT's greatest successes was its American tours. As result, the ideas and techniques used by the MAT actors of the 1923 and 1924 tours revolutionized American theatrical practices, and spurred a change in Russian culture.

[1] Richard Sites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7.

From its inception, Russian leaders saw the theatre not only as a source of entertainment, but as a means to spread ideas and Enlightenment. Peter I realized the importance of theatre as an educational medium, and he sponsored its development with such intent in mind. Later, in 1845, Nikolai Gogal, a writer and dramatist widely considered to be one of the leading figures of Russian literary realism, described theatre as "a kind of pulpit from which much good can be spoken to the world."[2]

Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko founded the MAT shortly after the abolition of imperial control over this art. With emergence of private entrepreneurship as a result of industrialization, the theatre received private funding, which kept it from being used as a tool by the tsar—thus maintaining independence over creativity (within the confines of censorship, of course). The MAT ultimately became a vehicle used to transmit the ideas and teachings of Stanislavsky, although not created with such a purpose. Consequently, it is impossible to separate the Theatre from Stanislavsky and his System because the two intertwined so deeply: each developed in reliance of the other's success.

As part of Russian "cultural explosion" of the end of the 18th century, Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko set out to modernize, develop, and reform Russian theatre. In doing so, they created a theatre with radical and innovative ideas in 1897, initially called the Popular Moscow Art Theatre. Their original design for the Theatre to provide performances to a new audience, the working class, was at the time fairly radical. As a result of Russian rapid industrialization, this growing class was becoming more powerful and believed its tastes should be satisfied, yet traditional theatre was still

[2] Murray Frame, *School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 1.

largely reserved for those of the upper classes until the second Russian Revolution (1917). Moreover, unlike the more widely used actor-led method, the repertoire-led method used by the MAT resulted in variation in the roles actors played in performances – some days a certain actor played the lead, while other days the same actor was only an extra. This also resulted in performances which often rejected the traditional representation of specific well-known characters. From the beginning, Stanislavsky intended to develop techniques that would help the actors achieve the effect of spontaneity in their performances on the stage, as well as to provide solutions to other problems actors faced.

Following the first Russian Revolution (1905), the theatre commenced its first foreign tour, which took it to Dresden, Leipzig, Prague, Vienna, Frankfurt, and Berlin. This tour in 1906, which subsequently earned the group world-wide recognition, was an attempt to recoup from losses of the abandonment of the 1905 season after the Revolution interrupted it. News of the MAT's achievements resonated across Europe, and the Emperor of Germany himself honored the troupe with his presence and congratulated Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko.[3]

It was not until after this tour that real development on Stanislavsky's System began to take place. He worked together with Leopold Sulerjitsky, his assistant and the Theatre's handyman, on the foundations of his system. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko and the theatre's players originally rejected the System, but eventually adopted it as the official working method of the MAT. Although Nemirovitch acknowledged Stanislavsky's System and required that it should be studied by the company in 1911, many of the

[3] Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, *My Life in the Russian Theatre* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1964), 290.

actors continued to drag their heels—which led to the creation of an innovation-focused branch in which Stanislavsky could experiment with new techniques and young, eager-to-learn actors.

In order to avoid grim consequences of the 1917 Revolutions in Russian life, the theatre turned again to the tried and true practice of touring. Having worked for them in 1906—the MAT embarked on a European and American tour—touring Berlin (September 1922), Paris (November 1922), and the USA (1923-1924). Of the MAT's excursions, the tour to the United States became one of its most notable successes, leaving the most extensive and longest lasting impact on the theatrical scenes of the countries visited.

Before the first and second tour, acting techniques greatly varied amongst theater schools. The disagreement among thespians over whether or not an actor should feel the emotion of the character he/she is portraying is at the core of the difference. The MAT's European achievements were well known in the States—some actors even knew Stanislavsky had introduced new methods (through news articles, those who had visited Russia, or personally worked with Stanislavsky), although most did not yet know any details about the methods themselves. Within a generation, acting styles in American theatre had changed completely; the majority of acting schools within the States would advertise being System based.

Negotiations between American producer, Morris Gest, and the MAT began to take place in 1922 which proved to be difficult—not only did Gest have to convince the MAT to tour American soil; there was the problem of both countries governments consenting to the tour. (For example, the American government did not recognize the

Soviet government until 1933.) The 1923 tour (January 2, 1923 – June 7, 1923) opened in New York with Aleksei Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor* (1868), followed by performances in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Pittsburg, New Haven, Hartford, Newark, Cleveland, and Detroit. In a letter back to Russia, Stanislavsky noted the remarkable nature of the MAT's reception in America, stating "We never had such a success in Moscow or anywhere else […] but just to give you an idea at what an embryonic state stage art is here and how eagerly they snatched up everything good that is brought to America."[4] This response was despite the mixed emotions of some Americans at the idea of having Soviet citizens on U.S. soil. In an atmosphere of Red Scare during the 1920s, groups like the American Defense Society claimed the MAT's members would spread harmful Bolshevik ideals once they arrived.

The second tour (November 23, 1923 – May 24, 1924) would, unfortunately for the Russian actors, not enjoy the same success as the first. The company signed a second contract with Gest, and in November 1923 the MAT crossed the Atlantic on the *Olympic* headed for New York for the second time. The novelty of plays in the Russian language began to wane for many American audiences. The decline in attendance demonstrated the fickle nature of Americans and their desire for the new. Theatre aficionados and critics, however, still flocked to the MAT's performances.

Although ticket sales declined during the second tour, the impression of the Russian actor as an expert of his craft was here to stay. Many actors desired the same success enjoyed by the MAT; to emulate this success, they needed to learn the MAT's method of acting. The notoriety of the tour directly contributed to the development of

[4] Paul Grey, "From Russia to America: A Critical Chronology," in *Stanislavski and America*, ed. Erika Munk (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 144.

both the Russian master as a source of knowledge in the American theatrical community and a large Russian influence in acting styles and methods. This, in turn, gave rise to the overwhelming number of Stanislavsky-based teaching schools and groups. These schools later trained Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler, the American theatrical gurus of the 20th century.

Although these American schools and teachers claimed to be Stanislavsky-based, problems of variance arose in the explanation of Stanislavsky's System, both in American and in Russia. Accounts of the System often differ in exactness or quality, due, in part, to mistranslated or misinterpreted first and second-hand accounts of his work. In both Russia and America, each writer or expert's own preferences or political biases flavored the descriptions of the System. But most likely they were due changing nature of Stanislavsky's ideas. Vasili Toporkov, an actor who worked under Stanislavsky as a part of the MAT from 1927 to 1938, wrote about and documented his time spent with the Russian director in *Stanislavski: In Rehersal*. In Toporkov's account, he remembers Stanislavsky declaring that theatre "demands constantly to be renewed, constant work on oneself" and "if those who create it don't take constant care of it, don't keep moving forward, do not develop and perfect it, it will soon die."[5] As the System developed further, those maestros' disciples who taught in America had limited, and in many cases non-existent, contact with the Russian master after their emigration; this lack of contact resulted in different interpretations based on when the artist last worked with Stanislavsky.

Although this tour's impact can be most identified in American culture, it did have an effect on Russian theatre and culture as well. On visiting America, many prominent

[5] Vasili Toporkov, *Stanislavski: In Rehearsal* (London: Routledge, 1988), 105-106.

MAT actors decided to stay, causing the Soviet Union to lose some of its most talented thespians. In addition, the tour itself isolated and protected the MAT during the Revolutionary period, keeping it out of reach of the revolutionary cultural extremists, such as the Proletkult, until things calmed down at home. The Proletkult (Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organizations), a self-appointed organization that in 1917 believed it was their mission to stimulate cultural consciousness through providing the working-class population with accessible art, like theatre performances and the opportunities to participate. The Proletkult attacked the MAT as too moderate, ignoring the mixed political views of the theatre and its original mission to provide the working-classes with theatre productions. In their extremism, they believed the MAT to be a bourgeoisie left-over which needed to be destroyed. This tour provided the theatre with distance from such organizations. In addition to protection, the tour most importantly provided the MAT with the financial support it so desperately needed—many of its actors struggled daily with hunger.

Although the tour provided a safe haven for the group, it drew suspicion from both the American population and Soviet new elite. Luckily, the theatre received protection by high-ranking officials, such as Lenin and Stalin, who favored Stanislavsky and the MAT. Lenin believed people needed more than what the bellicose Proletkult was attempting to offer; he believed they needed lyrical and poetic works. Eventually, Stalin's favoritism in the 1930s allowed for Stanislavsky's large influence in the theatrical community, and provided the model for the new genre of "Socialist Realism" for the Russian theatres. Ultimately, the control of the state in all spheres of life and

over the company grew, forcing the MAT to make concessions, such as producing more communist plays, that ensured the survival of the theatre.

This work fills a gap in literature, providing a historical analysis of Stanislavsky's theatre development, and its contribution to world culture. There have been many books written on Stanislavsky and the MAT, almost exclusively by those with backgrounds in theater; hence, these works reflect their interest in, and bias toward, Stanislavsky's system. They focus analysis on the success or failure of certain MAT productions, and most analyze Stanislavsky's teaching and the system he created (and how these techniques could be applied today). These books can be very enlightening and helpful to those who study acting or have an interest in directorial techniques; however, they are filled with theatrical jargon and less helpful to those primarily interested in the history of Russian or American theater and culture.

The foremost biographer on Stanislavsky is Jean Benedetti. He pursued a career as an actor, director, and writer, and eventually became the editor for *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters*, a collection of letters written by and to members of the MAT. Benedetti's other works include *Stanislavski*, along with numerous articles. His biography of Stanislavsky fills in the gaps of, and makes corrections to, Stanislavsky's own auto-biography. While this book is a helpful compendium to Stanislavsky's own works, *Stanislavsky* is lacking in its documentation.

For a comprehensive history of Russian Theatre, Marc Slonim's *Russian Theater: From the Empire to the Soviets* and *A History of Russian Theatre*, edited by Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, are two great sources with which to start. Slonim is an expert on Russian literature and, while his book is a good starting point, his

background as a journalist shows in his lack of documentation and bibliography or reference guide. *A History of Russian Theatre* is more helpful to a reader looking for more sources to branch out since the work does provide citations; however, these works have strong theatrical perspectives (not historical) since most of the contributors to the book are those with a background in theatre.

As for tracing the reception and acceptance of Stanislavsky's System in America, one of the best sources is Mel Gordon's *Stanislavsky in America: An Actor's Workbook*. He is a Professor of Theater at the University of California, Berkeley. Gordon's book traces the development of American theatre's reception of Stanislavsky's System, as well as the different variations and changes made to the teachings. This work provides the reader with the different people and groups practicing this system slightly before and after the MAT's 1923 performances in America; but, because of Gordon's background, this book is weighed down with information useful primarily to those interested in practicing theatre, including examples of teaching methods, like breathing techniques and exercises.

Thus, Stanislavsky's theory and theatre have been analyzed exhaustively by those with theatre backgrounds, but not by historians. The goal of my work is to introduce for the first time historical perspective to the subject. For so long, Stanislavsky and the MAT's legacy remained but a blip in the historical work of English language scholarship.

I argue that the transmission of Stanislavsky's ideas was directly related to the success of the MAT, in particular its 1923 tour to the United States, and that upon the achievements of the theatre his concepts gained the strength needed to change the

culture of both American and Russian Theatres. In the context of the overall historical background from 1920 to 1940, I use various sources: newspaper articles, magazine excerpts, letters, and the founders' own writings to highlight the cultural changes in American and Russian theatre resulting from the ideas Stanislavsky brought to American theatre on the 1923 and 1924 tours, in addition to providing documentation and a historical insight not covered by previous works on the topic.

CHAPTER 2

FOUNDATIONS

In order to trace the development of the MAT and its impact on Russian culture, it is important to first look at what came before the MAT tradition. Russian theatre's eminent status in 1890s through the 1930s among the previously established European theatres was anything but assured. In examining the origins of theatrical culture, theatre practices in Russia were essentially a replica of Western customs brought by masters of Germany, and later of Italy and France. Only after being given more freedom at the end of the 19th century did Russians take what they had learned and revolutionize theatrical practices, making the theatre theirs.

The development of Russian theatre did not follow the path taken by other Western theatres (most originated with folklore and ceremonial forms of acting). But by the end of the 17th century, Russia was able to assimilate European theatrical achievements, as well as other accepted Western practices and understandings as part of Enlightenment ideas.[6] The word *teatr*, only entering the Russian vocabulary in the 18th century, emerged at the end of the 19th century.[7] With Western-European models in acting techniques, production methods, writing, etc., the Russian theatre matured and established its own unique characteristics largely influenced by the taste of the ruler and upper class, as well as the emergence of Russian playwrights and directors. It is important to note that the development of the theatre in Russia, as everywhere, is

[6] Victor Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," in *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

[7] Catriona Kelly, "The Origins of the Russian Theatre," in *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18.

inseparable from the advancement of opera and ballet, due in part to the Imperial management of all three arts.

In the beginning development of Russian performance arts, the actor was expected to be well-rounded and a master of all three genres. An actor might one day perform a Shakespearian play and the next sing an opera written by Mozart.[8] Even those studying the art later received training in all three areas: Stanislavsky's theatre education was an example of this. He took ballet lessons, studied under the famed opera singer Fyodor Komissarzhevsky, received training at the schools of the Imperial Theatres, and attended performances at the Maly Theatre. In the course of the 19th century, the theatre became a noticeable element of public and intellectual life in Russia.

Under the Guidance of the Tsars

Interested in the culture of Western Europe, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich Romanov (1645-1676) sent a Russian representative, John Hebdon, in 1660 to import thespians from foreign countries to perform for him and his court. He also ordered a protestant clergyman, Johann Gregory, who had spent many years living abroad, to organize a theatre which first performed in 1672. Only nine plays took place at the court theater during Aleksei's reign, but these events were very important; the tsar and his courtiers personally attended them.[9] Aleksei's interest in, and introduction to, the theatre, may have laid the foundation for his son Peter's attraction to the art. According to Stanislavsky, it was Peter who "flung wide the gates of Russia," allowing for the

[8] Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," 7.
[9] Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," 41-42; Constantin Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art* (New York: Theatre Books, 1948), 9.

advancement and development of Russia and providing theatre with "its first opportunity."[10]

Peter the Great believed that culture had to have an educational purpose that would enlighten and strengthen the Empire. He witnessed the power of the theatre during his travels to Western Europe in 1697-1698: he saw ballet in Amsterdam and opera in Vienna, and was impressed by tragedies in England.[11] In the process of Westernization in all fields of Russian life and sponsoring theatre in Russia, Peter the Great welcomed masters of acting from the West and brought a German company under the direction of Johann Kunst to Russia. After Kunst arrived in 1702, Peter tasked him with training future generations of Russian actors; twelve Russian men were selected to train with Kunst.[12] This was Moscow's first public theater, and its repertoire consisted mainly of foreign classics it adapted for its Russian audiences.

Germans were the masters of theater in Russia until the reign of Empress Anna (1730-1740), niece of Peter the Great. During her control, a group of Italians, under the direction of Francesco Araia (who introduced the opera to St. Petersburg), arrived in St. Petersburg, thus destroying the exclusive German authority and creating a large Italian influence in the theatrical culture. Most fashionable in Europe at that time, The Italians developed the art of stagecraft in Russia with their extravagant sets and tools.[13]

During the reign of Peter's daughter Elizabeth (1741-1762), the birth of the national theater took place, owing its success to Alexander Sumarokov's plays, and Fydor Volkov's theatrical enterprise. Sumarokov is considered the founder of Russian

[10] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art,* 9.
[11] Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," 43.
[12] Marc Slonim, *Russian Theatre: From the Empire to the Soviets* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961), 23; Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," 43.
[13] Slonim, 24-5.

classical drama.[14] His works were the first Russian plays to be translated in French and well known in Parisian circles.[15] The play performed by the cadets quickly became a favorite topic of conversation among the upper class in the capital.[16] Around the same time, Fyodor Grigorevich Volkov, stepson of a merchant, returned home to his small town of Yaroslavl after visiting St Petersburg and Moscow; the theatrical innovations he saw while he was there inspired him.[17] Once home, he decided to fix up a barn as a theater and convinced family and friends to be taught the art of acting (Volkov being their teacher, director, and leading actor). Again, Elizabeth heard rumors of his work and successes, and on January 5, 1752 she summoned the Yaroslavl theatre to the capital. The tsarina decided to send some of the Yaroslavl actors to receive formal training at the Academy for the Nobility, where Sumarokov taught them. The Yaroslavl actors would later comprise the first professional Russian acting company upon their graduation in 1756. These developments influenced Elizabeth's launching a national Russian theater.

A growing desire among Russians to get involved in the arts—a number them becoming playwrights, opera singers, and ballerinas—also influenced Elizabeth's decision for a national theatre.[18] She issued an Imperial decree for the establishment of a Russian theater on August 30, 1756, and entrusted the management of the new theatre to Sumarokov. This decree formed a Russian theatre that held performances in tragedy and comedy, and was a significant event for Russian culture; it marked the

[14] Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," 49.
[15] W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia* (New York: Viking, 1998), 82.
[16] Borovsky, "Russian Theatre in Russian Culture," 51.
[17] Ibid., 52-3.
[18] Slonim, 26-7.

Russian theatre as a state establishment. Russian theatre artists under Elizabeth began to make strides in making the art their own, but for the most part remained distinctly European.

Theatrical culture continued to thrive under Catherine II (1762-1796) with her devotion for Enlightenment. She ordered the building of a theater later called the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow (1773), and founded a school for the training of actors, singers, and dancers in 1779 – The Imperial Theatrical School. In 1783, Catherine established the Administration of Theaters and tasked it with controlling theaters according to the will of the tsar or tsarina, as well as specifying the amount of money the Imperial Theater needed from the Russian Treasury.

In analyzing theatrical culture in Imperial Russia, it is very clear that, as elsewhere, it depended on the throne for its support. Private theatres also existed, but theaters outside the Winter Palace were taxed, not always successfully since private theatres were outside of the State Administration's jurisdiction, by one fourth of all their gross profits. This money, obtained through taxing the theatres, went toward the care of orphanages, and continued to be used for these purposes through the whole 19th century.[19]

Although until the reign of Alexander I (1801-1825) theatres of the West greatly influenced Russian repertoire, more and more people began to demand plays that applied more to their culture and lifestyle. Among these was Pyotr Alekseevich Plavilshchikov (dramatist, actor, and critic), who argued that the classic plays of the West, like those of Schiller and Shakespeare, portrayed a society that was distinctly different from the Russian way of life and was therefore no good. In "The Theatre", an

[19] Slonim, 26-7.

article Plavilshchikov wrote in 1792, he developed this idea and demanded the advancement of a purely Russian form of stagecraft with the goal of "improv[ing] human morals."[20] While those of the high aristocracy, the most influential and patrons of the performing arts, preferred the ballet and the opera, as well as foreign companies and actors.[21] During his reign, the status of the actor improved considerably, as can be seen from the numerous nobles who became interested in the profession of acting, although not always supported by their families, as was the case of Stanislavsky.

Thus, by the late 1790s, the Russian theatre, and culture as a whole, had begun the process of maturity and had demonstrated more originality—parting from its Western European roots. Authorities granted more independence to the theatre in 1882 when they allowed privately owned theatrical enterprises in the whole territory of the Russian Empire and abolished the Imperial monopoly of the theatre.[22] Until this point, private theatres had been taxed, but those who had avoided the levy had done so due to the vastness of Russia and lack of resources to pursue all privately owned theatres. The cultural atmosphere that followed generated new experimentation and ideas, such as those of the MAT founders.

Beginning in the 1850s, the Second Industrial Revolution transformed Europe, impacting modernization and the conditions of life and work.[23] Russia experienced the repressions of the Industrial Revolution slightly later than the rest of Europe. Industry in

[20] Pyotr Alekseevich Plavilshchikov, "The Theatre," *Spectator,* 1792.
[21] Slonim, 38-9.
[22] Ibid., 84.
[23] John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe: from the French Revolution to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 743.

Russia saw significant advancements in the mid-1890s, helped along by foreign investment from her allies.[24]

As in the rest of Europe, the changes in industry and manufacturing altered the composition of the Russian empire—a working class emerged totaling approximately three million by 1914.[25] This rapid growth in industrial working class throughout Europe caused an unprecedented change in audience and the art demanded (new forms) by this growing group. Artists responded to the taste of these new art consumers.

In response to the changing cultural conditions, more and more people began to believe that acting and production methods were old-fashioned, obsolete, and lacked creativity. Artists all over Europe, like the creator of the MAT, began to experiment with new forms of art. This period of "cultural explosion" that took place in Russia is known as the Silver Age (1890-1917) and produced first-class masterpieces in literature, poetry, visual arts, ballet, and music.

In this new fertile cultural atmosphere in 1897, between two o'clock in the afternoon on the twenty-second of June and eight o'clock in the following morning, two men sat down to create the MAT. Those men were Konstantin Stanislavsky, a textile mogul and man with a passion for the art of theatre, and Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, head of the drama section of the Philharmonic School and prize-winning writer of popular comedies. Their brainchild and its creation was a part of a general cultural movement that swept over Russia at the end of the nineties and called for new approaches to artistic expression and innovations. In order to understand why these

[24] Merriman, 750.
[25] Ibid., 751.

men wanted this kind of theatre and why they approached theatre practices in the way they did, it is interesting to look into their pasts.

Konstantin Stanislavsky: Early Life, Education, and Inspiration

Konstantin Sergeievich Alekseiev, the son of Sergey Vladimirovich Alexeiev and Elizaveta Vasilievna Alekseieva, was born on January 5, 1863 (only later did he adopt the name Stanislavsky). His father was a wealthy Russian manufacturer, while his mother was the daughter of a famous French actress, Varley.[26]

Because of the family's wealth, Stanislavsky and his brothers and sisters grew up in a very privileged atmosphere—one that was greatly influenced by the artistic scene of Moscow. [27] In the mid-19th century, Russian art grew dramatically in every area—ballet, opera, theatre, literature, and painting—and families like the Alexsievs, took full advantage of all of it. From an early age, Stanislavsky's family took him to the opera, ballets at the Bolshoi, and even circus performances, which were his favorite.[28] All of these gave the Alekseiev children material for play, but also made an impression that later influenced Stanislavsky's career and System. One of their favorite pastimes was putting on their own performances at their family estate. All of the children were interested in, and passionate about, theatre and make-believe, which, according to Stanislavsky, was "Perhaps […] an heirloom from our French grandmother actress."[29]

[26] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 21.
[27] Ibid., 23.
[28] Ibid., 32.
[29] Ibid., 58.

Instead of attending the Moscow University, Stanislavsky convinced his father to let him join their family business in textiles.[30] With less to study and more free time, Stanislavsky's uncles and cousin told him that "it is necessary for you to occupy yourself with some sort of social work."[31] Fortunately, the opening of the role as director in the Russian Musical Society and Conservatory was open—an organization founded by Nikoai Rubinstein with a mission to educated and improve the standard of music within Russia.[32] He was elected to the post February 17, 1886.[33]

Despite their love of the theatre and their participation in amateur plays, Stanislavsky's family disliked his interest in, and growing ambition to have, a professional career in the art. For one, the professional status of the actor was much lower in Russia than it was in other western European countries. It was not appropriate for a person of Stanislavsky's status, according to his family and others, to become a professional actor, when that profession had been exclusively held by serfs, and later those of the lower class.[34] Also, Stanislavsky's family worried that his passion for theatre took too much time away from the family textile business (upon which many of them relied on the income received from it). In an entry in his diary on March 21, 1890, Stanislavsky wrote "If there were no money I could go on to the stage. I would go hungry, it's true, but I would be able to act to my heart's content. Yes, my work at the factory is pointless and therefore of no interest."[35]

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[30] Benedetti, *Stanislavski* (London: Routledge, 1988), 18.
[31] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 79.
[32] Ibid., 76-77.
[33] Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, 21.
[34] Ibid., 21.
[35] Ibid., 55.

As the family grew up and began to put on less plays, Stanislavsky began to act with amateur groups outside the family theatre. With his family's disapproval of his ambition for a career in theater, he needed to keep this secret life from his parents and family, and the easiest solution to this problem was the adoption of a stage name, Stanislavsky—after the ballerina Stanislavskai, a boyhood favorite.[36]

During his free time as an adult, Stanislavsky received training in the dramatic schools in Russia. The schools of the Imperial Theatres (created by Catherine the Great) accepted him due, in part, to one of his friends, Glikeria Fedotova, being an examiner for the school. Most of his classmates were much younger than him, being only around fifteen, while he was the director of the Musical Society.[37] Stanislavsky describes this experience as feeling like he was "a piece of dough" being "deprived of my own individuality"; where teachers described the parts they were supposed to play to them and how the role was traditionally portrayed, but left out the method and the creative technique used to reach that goal.[38]

Stanislavsky knew there had to be a better way of teaching acting students: one which taught the pupil a creative method that would help solve the problems of the actor and assist them in achieving the character they wished to portray. Prominent actors intensely guarded the systems they personally worked out as their own secrets.[39] Therefore, he was sorely disappointed in the teaching methods being used at the time, and left the school within three weeks. This feeling of disappointment with Russia's theatrical training would later motivate his creation of the System.

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[36] Benedetti, *Stanislavski,* 24.
[37] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 89.
[38] Ibid., 89-90.
[39] Ibid., 79.

Some of the early inspirations for his acting and directorial career stemmed from his attendance at ballet and opera performances as an early child and young adult. Those who are familiar with Stanislavsky will know that he trained in both schools. In his early childhood, only being about six or eight, Stanislavsky and his brother went to the Italian opera; this experience left a deep impression on Stanislavski. The opera influenced his impressions "of sound, music, rhythm and the voice," which "were fated to play a large part" in his career.

> They were the signpost that led me, and not so long ago at that, to the study of the voice, to its placement, to the nobility of sound and direction, to rhythmical, musical intonation, to a true view of the soul of vowels, consonants, words, phrases, sentences and speech. [40]

He dreamed of becoming an opera singer and took lessons from Fydor Komissarzhevsky, the famous tenor.[41] With Komissarzhevsky, Stanislavsky also discussed new possibilities for the theatre, which impacted his own views and goals for the art. Less important than opera, yet still significant to the actor and influential in Stanislavsky's viewpoint was the ballet. He believed ballet was important to the actor in order to "train the body from the artist of the ballet," despite the need for a different set of rhythm and gestures used by the dramatic artist.[42] His training in these artistic genres would influence techniques used to train actors and assist in preparation for a role.

Another source of inspiration for the System's creator was the Maly Theater in Moscow, the most important Imperial Theater in the second half of the 19th century. It became a very important inspiration to the creator of the System. The Maly is referred

[40] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 37.
[41] Ibid., 132.
[42] Ibid., 102.

to as “the house of the actor, having trained a considerable numbers of exceptional actors and actresses.”[43] In his memoirs, Stanislavsky recalled the impact of the Maly on the consciousness of Russian theatre and on the education of young people interested in the art. In the 1880s, he and his friends prepared for a performance by reading the play and critical articles concerning the work beforehand, and after the piece they held debates.

During the latter part of the 19th century, the age of realism came to Russia—the desire to portray real life without idealization of all, even lower, social strata (peasants and workers) with articulated social concerns. For Russians, Realism came after more than a hundred years of national assimilation of European art as a new nationalistic movement. The movement was short lived elsewhere in Europe but long dominated the artistic scene in Russia. This approach was very popular in that it caused Russian artists to appreciate how important it was to be distinctly Russian.

The Maly became well known for its promotion of realism, resulting from the work of Mikhail Semyonovich Shchepkin. Shchepkin was arguably the best actor of the 1840s. His work, *Memoirs of a Serf-Actor*, was the go-to manual for an actor seeking to achieve a natural (as opposed to conventional academic) appearance on stage until Stanislavsky created his system (Stanislavsky’s own copy of *Memoirs* survives in the archives and contains notes of his progress).[44] Some Theatre Historians, such as Anatoly Altschuller, have argued that Shchepkin was a predecessor and “laid the

[43] Slonim, 85.
[44] Ibid., 85.

foundations of the system of acting which would be brought to its finest fruition in the work of Stanislavsky."[45]

The Maly was a sacred place for the System's creator. After the Maly suffered damage from vandals and cross fire resulting from the October revolution (1917), Stanislavsky lamented over the damage in a letter to Aleksandr Yuzhin on November 8, 1917, "I feel grief and rage. It is as if they had raped my mother, as if they had insulted the memory of Mikhail Semyonovich [Skchepkin]."[46] Although there was no school to teach Shchepkin's methods, the continuity of the Maly in using his techniques resulted in Stanislavsky's claims that his own education came from the Maly performances, his 'university', and it was the standard upon which he judged his own work. Realism is the most important foundation of Stanislavsky's System.

Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko: Co-founder

Nemirovitch-Dantchenko was the son of an impoverished lieutenant-colonel and a mother of Caucasian origin; he later married Baroness Korf, daughter of a famous Russian educator.[47] In the early eighties, be began his career as a playwright and theatre critic for newspapers and magazines. He was a successful dramatist whose plays were included in the repertoire at the Maly. Moreover, Nemirovitch won the Griboiedov Prize from Play of the Year twice, the second time being victorious over Anton Chekhov's *Seagull.* His success granted him the position on the Repertoire Committee of the Imperial Theatres and membership to the Russian Society of

[45] Anatoly Altschuller, "Actors and Acting, 1820 – 1900," in *A History of Russian Theater*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 122.
[46] Laurence Senelick, ed., *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 369.
[47] Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, *My Life in the Russian Theatre*, 24; Slonim, 106.

Authors.[48] In 1891, he worked as a teacher for the Philharmonic Dramatic School, stressing the importance of understanding all aspects of the play and opposing traditionalism and artificiality.[49]

Nemirovitch believed the unchanging procedures and predictable performances of Russian theatre needed to be reformed.[50] 1897 marked a turning-point in Nemirovitch-Dantchenko's career. No longer writing plays, he became determined to do something about the state of Russian theatre. Like Stanislavsky, he was devoted to the idea of popular or 'open' theatre. After he submitted his plans to the government in early 1897, it refused them due to administrative disinterest.[51] In that same year, he sent another letter to the Imperial Administration regarding necessary improvements for the Maly Theater. Less than confident with the ineptitude of government officials, Nemirovitch-Dantchenko reached out to Stanislavsky—believing his goals might be accomplished in a private theater.[52]

First Meeting and Creation of the MAT

Nemirovitch-Dantchenko knew of Stanislavsky's work and his desire for a professional theatre, which were hardly secret. Nemirovitch made no headway with the Imperial Administration. Nemirovitch figured that he and Stanislavsky had similar enough interests and therefore might succeed in collaboration together through a privately-backed theatre, despite never having met.

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[48] Benedetti, *Stanislavski,* 58.
[49] Slonim, 106-7.
[50] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 70.
[51] Jean Benedetti, ed., *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.
[52] Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* 3; Benedetti, *Stanislavski,* 59.

The two visionaries met at the first-class hotel, the Slavonic Bazaar, June 22, 1897, which was frequented at the time by the artistic types of Moscow. (It was that very day in which the Imperial Administration rejected Nemirovitch-Dantchenko's proposals.[53]) Nemirovitch was worried about what kind of man he was about to meet; he found some actors to be "quite unbearable" off-stage. But he was pleasantly surprise with Stanislavsky and his polite, reserved demeanor. In his auto-biography, he recalled his first impressions of Stanislavsky: "It astonished you to find nothing specifically of the actor about him. There was no arresting feature of theatricality or of intonations borrowed from the stage."[54] Both men, although never friends, immediately gravitated towards each other and commenced in a truly enthusiastic conversation that traced the development of the MAT.

They both agreed on the flaws of currently established theaters, and agreed that innovation could only take place in a new theater. They believed they could create this new theatre together, since their ideas corresponded so neatly; Nemirovitch claimed that in the course of this meeting there was not one disagreement.[55] The amount of material discussed between the two men was immense: "the foundations of our future enterprise, the questions of 'pure art', our artistic ideals, scenic ethics, technique, the plans of organization, the projects of our future repertoire, and our mutual relations."[56] They decided to continue their meeting at Stanislavsky's family villa, Liubimovka.[57]

It was very important to Stanislavsky to put everything "down in writing." He did not trust his own memory or anyone else's. When he discussed a problem with

[53] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 79; Slonim, 107.
[54] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 2.
[55] Ibid., 83.
[56] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 294.
[57] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 83-4.

someone to the point of a conclusion, he told him or her to write it down, and if they claimed to be able to remember what they had discussed, Stanislavsky would say, "I don't believe you. And don't you trust your memory! Write it down!"[58] So it is not surprising that he took minutes of their first meeting.

By the end of their meeting they had created and organized a working model for their theater. They dreamt of a theater with an educational purpose for both the actor and the public. The two men imagined their future production methods, the necessity to have five or six different dress rehearsals, and even going into such detail to include how the plays were to be announced and the curtain drawn (raised rather than drawn to the sides).[59] In their meeting, they also created a list of Nemirovitch's students and Stanislavsky's company to determine which actors would be right for their new theater, as well as described the abilities of each individual.[60]

Finally, and most importantly, they divided artistic jurisdiction into two parts. Because of Nemirovitch-Dantchenko's experience and authority in the realm of literature, they decided to give him, according to Stanislavsky's minutes, "the literary veto." Stanislavsky, with fifteen years of amateur experience as a stage director and actor, was to be the authority on stage direction and artistic production in the theatre; thus, he had "the artistic veto."[61]

Nemirovitch and Stanislavsky invented the name for the Art Theatre after the meeting. They created this new theatre, named the Moscow Popular Art Theatre, with the intent of providing free or reasonably priced performances for the working class. As

[58] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 85.
[59] Slonim, 108.
[60] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 87; Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 294-5.
[61] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 295.

can be seen through the name change, this idea would not work for them at this time in Russian history.

Conclusion

The development of theatre in Russia, from the warm embrace of Peter the Great until the second 1917 Revolution, relied on the tsar for guidance, growth, and in some cases finance. Due to the origin from above and state patronage, theatre in Russia has long been seen as being educational in purpose, as it was first used by Peter. Among other European powers, Russia's theatrical scene was slow to mature and cultivate its own identity. Just as theatre was a late arrival to the cultural presence, the Industrial Revolution and era of modernity reached Russia much later than the rest of Europe, but with it came new forms of art—a "cultural exposition." By the later part of the 19th century, realism would dominate Russia's theatres with the Maly theatre at the center of the promotion for the genre.

Responding to the demand of new social groups—the workers—Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch came up with the innovated project of the Moscow Popular Art Theatre. "Popular" was a radical word and a theatre created with such a purpose in mind scared away would be supporters for a time. The MAT would overcome bumps in the path, such as this. Furthermore, Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch were on a path that would change Russian theatre and popular culture in Russia and America with their tour in 1923 and 1924. Stanislavsky's ideas on a method of acting had not yet begun to develop, but with the creation of the MAT and his role with the theatre, he established the idea of directors being artists.[62]

[62] Arkady Ostrovsky, "Imperial and Private Theatres, 1882-1905" in *A History of Russian Theater*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 223.

CHAPTER 3

OBSTACLES OVERCOME AND THE CREATION OF STANISLAVSKY'S SYSTEM

1887-1923

The MAT faced numerous difficulties during their first couple of decades of existence, most of which were completely out of their control and affected all of Russia. Before their American tour, the MAT had gone through three revolutions (resulting in 1917 with a new Bolshevik government), The Great War (1914 – 1918), Civil War (1917 – 1921), and NEP (1921 – 1928). These events help explain the MAT's desire for tours and the need to recoup financial losses. If not for these periods of turmoil in Russian society that on the surface may seem like completely devastating events for the Theatre, the MAT would not have the international fame it has enjoyed for the past 100 years.

The Early Years: 1897 – 1906

One of the first obstacles faced by the founders was not a political problem, but instead a matter of finance. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko assumed that Stanislavsky would foot the bill for the new venture, while Stanislavsky argued that his funds were tied up in other ventures and they would have to find the financing elsewhere. This proved to be very difficult, primarily because of the name of the project—the Popular Moscow Art Theatre.

Possible investors were hesitant to become involved in a theatre with a "popular" mission – to provide performances to the growing working class. Very slowly they gained 18,000 roubles, mostly in small investments of 1,000 to 2,000 roubles, with

Savva Morozov, a wealthy business man and Bolshevik supporter, the only major investor other than Stanislavsky. Eventually, Stanislavsky invested 10,000 roubles—by not funding the operation entirely, Stanislavsky intended to protect the reputation of the theatre as well as his own. He did not want the theatre to appear to be exclusively under his control, but instead maintain an educational purpose.[63] This struggle to find financial support for the new theatre made Nemirovitch extremely aware of the term "popular" when obtaining permission from the authorities to perform. Therefore, Nemirovitch was extremely careful with wording in all forms required to start and conduct a private theatre. Despite these rocky starts and difficulty in launching an extremely new concept in theatre development, the MAT began rehearsals at Pushkino, outside Moscow, June 1898.

Their first production was Aleksei Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor*, and the play was an instant success. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the rest of the season. Sopohocles' *Antigone* and other plays from their repertoire failed to reach and excite audiences. Choosing *Fyodor* as the first play to be shown proved smart, and it would be one of the companies best productions for years to come and also showed off Stanislavsky's talents when others hoped he would fail. Some believed that his failure would prove that to break the rules of one's class would have disastrous results. But the biggest disappointment the MAT had yet to face came in January 1899, when authorities deemed a free performance for factory workers to be illegal, because the theatre failed to obtain permission from a fourth censor. This was vital step in the process of Russian private theatre conduct, since the fourth censor's obligation was to

[63] Jean Benedetti, "Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre 1898-1938" in *A History of Russian Theater*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 256.

inspect material presented to working class spectators. At the suggestion of Chekhov, the theatre dropped Popular, and officially became the MAT.[64]

The MAT had its hits and misses, and slowly gained the respect and admiration of Russian audiences in and outside Moscow (traveling to St. Petersburg in 1901). When the MAT finally felt like it had legs on which to stand, the 1905 Revolution knocked those legs out from under them. The 1905 season was abandoned due to the chaos and general mood of the Russian population in Moscow.

Stanislavsky describes these events in his auto-biography, *My Life in Art*. Before the 1905 Revolution took place, a revolutionary feeling and rumors were in the air. Theatre censorship was at an all-time high due to governmental fear that the theatres were a hotbed for propaganda. The censors marked off the play's dialogue with a blue pencil anything that made the slightest hint in this direction or might provoke conflict.[65]

During one of their performance during the Revolution in 1905, the audience mistook a "mob" of actors for a real Black Hundred gang, a Rightest group who considered the MAT to be too revolutionary and an "enemy of the Motherland." The spectators believed one of the actors was actually shot. Disaster was narrowly avoided when audience members reached for their firearms ready to shoot the supposed Black Hundred on the stage, described in a letter written by Stanislavsky to Vera Kotlyarevskaya.[66] This resulted in the play having to be stopped, and explaining to the audience that he was only acting. This event, according to Stanislavsky, helped to explain their desire and reasons for a European tour in 1906.[67]

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[64] Benedetti, "Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre 1898-1938," 260.
[65] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art,* 390.
[66] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 208.
[67] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 439-40.

When Revolution broke out, it became apparent in an atmosphere of national strike in November 1905 their season could no longer continue in Moscow. There was no time for art or the theatre with the chaos surrounding the December uprising in Moscow.[68] According to Stanislavsky's memoirs,

> Our performances stopped for the time being, we locked ourselves in our homes, the actors organized a self-defense, and headed by the inspector of the theatre and his helper, guarded the theatre day and night. A little later the shooting in the streets stopped, but the state of siege still continued. The city authorities forbade the inhabitants to go out on the streets after eight in the evening.[69]

The theatre was closed, and no revenue could be expected from Muscovites. In a private letter, written 29 November 1905, Stanislavsky disclosed to Vera Kotlyarevskaya that although the theatre was currently intact, by the end of the season there would not be enough capital to continue.[70] The decision to leave Russia for a tour was agreed upon, and hastily put together.

Although such a decision may seem easy amidst the backdrop of revolution and the risk of financial ruin, in reality it was much more difficult. The financial responsibility of a tour lied exclusively on the MAT. Despite this risk and other difficulties, including finding a vacant theatre mid-season, the MAT's leaders made the decision to embark on the tour.

The MAT sent A. L. Vishnevsky, an actor from the company, ahead to make preparations for the tour and find an available theatre— obtaining the 'Berliner Theatre' for their performances in Berlin. After a series of conversations with the entire company on appropriate conduct and representation of the theatre abroad and everyone signed a contract based on these requirements, the MAT, which included eighty-seven people,

[68] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 438.
[69] Ibid., 440.
[70] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 209.

followed to Berlin in late January (their first production opening February 10, 1906).[71] The plays they performed consisted of *Tsar Fyodor*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters*, *The Lower Depths*, and *An Enemy to the People*. The only foreign play presented by the MAT would be *An Enemy to the People* (Stanislavsky's only leading role in the tour). This was because they felt that a Russian theatre group should display Russian plays while on tour.[72] The 1905 Revolution thus provided the spring board for the 1906 tour, which would assist in spreading the MAT's ideas.

With the financial risks involved, the MAT was unsure of how they would be received by the Germans. Between 1905 and 1906, many Germans felt that the Russians were a backwards people and by this point tension that would result in a continental war had already built-up. In the 1890s, Russia turned to an alliance with France after Germany allowed the Reinsurance Treaty (between the Germans and the Russians) to expire. This alliance between France and Russia created the [perception of a two front war of which Germany's generals were so fearful.[73] The MAT took a high stakes gamble in their 1906 tour; not only were they unsure of how they would be received, they took a risk of financial ruin—one that rested solely on their own shoulders.

When the MAT first arrived in Berlin they were greeted with suspicion and, according to Stanislavsky, "in a manner that could not be called hospitable."[74] This is not surprising in light of how the Germans felt about Russians at the time, and the repercussions of the 1905 Revolution in Russia felt in Germany. The Germans had not

[71] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art,* 441; Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 277.
[72] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 279.
[73] David Fromkin, *Europe's Last Summer: Who Started the Great War in 1914?* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 61.
[74] Stanislavsky, My Life in *Art*, 441.

anticipated that a troupe from Russia could actually produce good theatre; this is evident in the expectations about the MAT of the stage hands they hired to run the lights, curtains, and props. These hired hands were surprised that the MAT did not bring "trapezes, ladders, ropes, or walking wire" with them as they assumed the Russians had to be an acrobatic troupe.[75] But like the MAT was able to accomplish later in the theatre's history with their relationships with other countries, they were able to wipe away the preconceived notions and suspicions of the German population, and put on great performances.

German audiences were deeply impressed by the realistic style of the MAT's art. News articles in Germany raved about their success: "Hats off to you Muscovites! You have grown up in the soil of modernity and in the soil of the historic past, but there is something in you which belongs to to-morrow and the day after, and the future."[76] In a letter to his brother, Stanislavsky wrote "Nearly all end their articles with the cry: we know the Russians are over a hundred years behind politically but, dear God, how far they have overtaken us artistically."[77] It seemed that the news of their performances reached the royal family; and after the Empress was impressed by their performance of *Tsar Fyodor,* she convinced the Emperor Wilhelm to attend.

The MAT received a phone call from representatives saying that Wilhelm would like to attend their performance of *Tsar Fyodor*, but on his only free evening another play was scheduled for presentation.[78] Excited about the Emperor's request, they immediately agreed to his request. Stanislavsky had been told previous to their journey

[75] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art,* 441.
[76] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 285.
[77] Beneditti, *Stanislavski*, 153.
[78] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 445; Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 289-90.

to Berlin that "If the Kaiser comes, you won't have enough place for the audience."[79] This advice could not have been truer; the streets were flooded with the vehicles of those attending that night's performance and the only room left in the theatre was standing room.[80]

It turned out that Wilhelm's attendance and approval was the best advertisement the MAT could have hoped for. This event totally changed the attitude of Berliners towards the group, and for the rest of their time spent in Berlin the MAT played almost exclusively to full houses.[81] This was impressive financially when considering that the MAT made, on average, 2,500 marks a night, an amount equal to that earned by the most popular German theatre, the Deutsches Theatre.[82] Stanislavsky remembered that subsequent to this, other actors, individuals, and the Russian community in Germany welcomed them in, much like audiences would on their American tour in 1923 after the MAT overcame suspicion by impressing them with their performances.[83]

Despite what seemed like financial success and gain, the revenue the MAT earned abroad was barely enough to cover their cost and stay afloat for a season longer, as stated by Stanislavsky in a letter to his brother Vladimir on March 6, 1906.[84] Overall, the tour was a tremendous success. It established the MAT among the great theatres of Europe; the Russian theatre was no longer viewed as stuck in old ways borrowed from older European forms as it had previously. News of their success traveled across the world, even reaching American critics and theatre enthusiasts. This

[79] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 445.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 291.
[82] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 211.
[83] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 447.
[84] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 211.

knowledge in the United States of the previously secluded MAT, which had until that time never left Russia, would play a large role in their willingness and desire of some to see the Russian players.

Stanislavsky's System: 1906 - 1911

Stanislavsky's own analysis of his success and experience in Germany stimulated him to conceptualize the strengths and weaknesses of his acting method. People who watched his performances raved about his acting skill, but while on stage he felt distracted. He needed a break, and went on vacation in Finland in the summer of 1906. While there, Stanislavsky spent his time on the beach and cliff tops overlooking the sea, reflecting on past performances and observing the beachgoers. Through his reflection, he began to realize that his performances were plagued "by bad theatrical habits and tricks, by the desire to please the public, by incorrect methods of approach to creativeness, day after day, at every repeated performance!"[85] He determined that in order to fix these problems he needed to create a favorable mental state for creativity and inspiration.

Unlike other art forms that require artists to create only when they feel drawn and inspired to work, an actor must summon their creativity at will, when the curtain rises, or when it is demanded of them. While watching the children play on the beach, he realized they had the ability to shut out the world and that through their imagination any feat was possible.[86] Through this revelation he realized the importance of emotional

[85] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 460.
[86] Mel Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America: An Actor's Workbook* (London: Routledge, 2010), 8.

recall. “I came to understand that creativeness begins from that moment when the soul and imagination of the actor there appears the magical, creative *if*.”[87]

With these theories in mind, Stanislavsky returned to Moscow excited to tell the MAT about his findings. He would be disappointed, for his ideas were not eagerly accepted or absorbed by the actors of the MAT. The actors, according to Stanislavsky, “grew angry and said that I had turned the rehearsals into an experimental laboratory, and that actors were not guinea pigs to be used for experimentation.”[88]

The only person at the MAT receptive to his ideas was the theatre’s handyman, Leopold Sulerjistsky, who became Stanislavsky’s trusted friend and assistant in his venture to develop an acting method. Sulerjitsky left Russia for a while, and upon his return was forced to live outside the city of Moscow because of past political activities. He visited the MAT often, and after performances slept in the streets dressed in the disguise of a sailor. Once the company began to get to know him, members invited Suler home with them. They “adopted” Sulerjistsky and called him by his nickname “Suler.” He then began to work in the theatre, performing odd jobs, such as moving scenery, making props and costumes, or assisting actors in rehearsing their lines.[89]

Sulerjistsky’s past experiences, especially those gained during his time spent out of Russia in Canada, affected the development and techniques of Stanislavsky’s method, as can be seen in Stanislavsky’s memoirs. Tolstoy personally selected Suler, a follower of his teachings, to assist in the organization of approximately one thousand Dukhobors’ emigration to Canada from the Caucasus. Amongst the Dukhabors, a

[87] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 466.
[88] Ibid., 462-3.
[89] Ibid., 470-471.

persecuted Christian sect, Suler learned the practice of yoga and meditation.[90] Suler felt like these techniques might help Stanislvasky, so he taught the director basic exercises and stretches. Stanilsavsky immediately saw a connection between yoga and the creative state of mind.

It is unclear whether or not Suler was the first to introduce Stanislavsky to yoga.[91] The interest in the Far East escalated in Russia after the Russo-Japanese War, and by 1913, Russia contained thirty-five occult organizations.[92] Regardless of the original introduction to yoga, Suler and Stanislavsky worked together to create movements that would assist actors in tapping into a creative place.

In search of creating an atmosphere of creativity, Stanislavsky explored the exotic techniques and lessons learned from the practice of yoga. During his early work on the System, Stanislavsky felt it was as important for the actor to be spiritually ready for a performance as it was to be physically prepared; to "enter the temple of that spiritual atmosphere in which alone it is possible to create."[93] He placed an emphasis on the concept of *prana*, meaning breath, and the use of *pranayama* exercises. Pranayama exercises include a focus on eyes, hands, and deep rhythmic breathing. The importance placed upon breathing rhythmically can be seen through Stanislavsky's writings, lectures given by the director, and interviews provided by past cast members and students of Stanislavsky.

Yogis used rhythmic breathing to achieve concentration, and Stanislavsky felt the same techniques could be used to help actors. Very few references to yoga exist

[90] Gordon, 9; Andrew White, "Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and Turn-of-the-Century Occultism on the System," *Theatre Survey* 47 (May 2006): 79.
[91] White, 79.
[92] Ibid., 76-77.
[93] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 348.

explicitly within the writings of the director; rather, he referred to yoga and its importance to his System in a more general sense (such as in his work *My Life in Art*). There are, however, a few key references that highlight the initial importance of yoga to the creation of the System. In his rehearsal notes, Stanislavsky defined and discussed *prana*, and in his work, *Creating the Role*, the System's creator discusses the work of yogis and their ability to "work miracles in the realm of the subconscious and superconscious have much practical advice to offer."[94]

Stenographic notes record Stanislavsky's lecture to the Bolshoi opera studio. In this lecture he described that he based his whole System on "laws of correct breathing" and "the correct positions of the body."[95] According to the lecture, the foundation of stage actors must be built first upon lessons in breathing.[96] The importance of techniques gained through the use of yoga continued in the interviews of Stanislavsky's students and MAT actors.

Vera Soloviova, First Studio member and MAT actor who appeared and remained in America, gave an interview to Paul Grey in which she recalled Stanislavsky's teachings on concentration. "The circle" was a technique established to assist the actor in concentration, focusing on one's stage performance rather than the audience.[97] The actors, according to Soloviova, were to imagine a circle around them and send "'prana' rays of communication in the space and to each other. Stanislavsky said 'send the prana there—I want to reach through the tips of my finger—to God—the

[94] White, 83; Stanislavsky, *Creating the Role* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 69.
[95] William H. Wegner, "The Creative Circle: Stanislavsky and Yoga," Educational Theatre Journal 28, no.1 (March 1976): 86-87.
[96] Ibid., 86-87.
[97] Wegner, 86-87; Paul Grey, "The Reality of Doing: Interviews with VERA SOLOVIOVA, STELLA ADLER, and SANFORD MEISNER," in *Stanislavsky and America*, ed. Erika Munk (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 211.

sky—or, later on, my partner. I believe in my inner energy and I give it out—I spread it."[98] Although Stanislavsky's interest in yoga began to dwindle, he never abandoned the use of rhythmic breathing or the creative circle. First Studio students who remained in or traveled to America and taught American actors continued using the lessons learned from yoga. Those discussing Stanislavsky's System and his teachings often ignore the use of yoga in the early creation of the System; rather, they place a focus upon psychological inspirations.

Another experimental technique used by Stanislavsky was that of memory. While developing his method, Stanislavsky came across the works of Théodule-Armand Ribot (a French psychologist) in Russian translation. According to Ribot's books on Affective Memory, the emotions resulting from past incidents are imprinted deep within the brain. Through sensory recall, these previous emotions can be brought out. Ribot's theories meshed well with Stanislavsky's concept of the creative state of mind: creativity and feelings could be evoked by the actor's senses, not summoned solely by the player's desire.[99]

These discoveries, which were psychological (through the works of Ribot) and physical (yoga), led Stanislavsky to believe that practice in sense memory allowed an actor to tap into personal memories, thus assisting in their ability to portray real life emotions on the stage. This development and discovery eventually became the defining characteristic of Stanislavsky's teaching and the performances of the MAT.

Stanislavsky's fascination with experimental techniques produced a new venue—the First Studio. Beginning in 1912, Stanislavsky, with Suler's help, created the First

[98] Paul Grey, "The Reality of Doing," 211.
[99] Gordon, 9.

Studio—a place where he could experiment with acting techniques as he had always dreamed. The MAT actors had grown tired of Stanislavsky's experiments; therefore, Stanislavsky invited new cohorts to his studio in an effort to achieve the results for which he was looking.

Stanislavsky and Suler worked with young actors who sought them out and chose to study Stanislavsky's system.[100] Among those selected were Evgeni Vakhtangov, Alexander Dikki, Valentin Smishlayev, Vera Soloviova, Andrius Jilinsky, Michael Chekhov, Richard Boleslavsky, and Maria Ouspenskaya.[101]

This "Golden Age" of great experimentation ended in 1916 with the sudden and untimely death of Suler. After his death, Suler's importance to Stanislavsky and the theatre was demonstrated by bringing his body to the studio's foyer, an event Stanislavsky recalled in a letter: "The two days that he lay there were very moving. Everyone immediately understood exactly who Suler had been and what the studio (and the theatre) had lost."[102] While others tried to replace Stanislavsky's right hand man, no one could live up to Suler's legacy. Thus, future development on the System fell entirely on Stanislavsky.

According to Stanislavsky, the creation and success achieved in the First Studio caused tension between the main group and the Studio, and between Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch, thus causing a natural parting of ways. In reality, by 1906 Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch had a very tense relationship already. Soviet historians attempting to preserve the perfect reputation of the ideal theater upon which Soviet Realism was based covered up the discord between the two men, both during that time and later.

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[100] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 551.
[101] Gordon, 10-11.
[102] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 364.

Soviet concealment of the two founder's conflict can be seen in part by the banning of Mikhail Bulgakov's unfinished novel known as *Theatrical Novel* or *Black Snow*. The novel, written at the end of Bulgakov's life, was a satire of Stanislavsky and his time spent with the Moscow Art's Theatre. It first appeared in 1967 to the Russian public, around the same time as his legendary work, *the Master and Margarita*, all thanks to his widow's determination.[103] Even so, the tension between the founders had already begun to surface by 1962, five years before Bulgakov's book was published.[104]

The two men disagreed on the direction of the MAT as early as 1906. Nemirovitch saw little use for Stanislavsky's new methods and believed he must take over complete management to save the theatre from financial ruin. He attempted to rid the MAT of Stanislavsky. However, other board members, like Kachalov, felt the MAT would not be the MAT, but rather only a great theatre, without Stanislavsky. Between November 1906 and February 1907 they conversed via letters on what should be done regarding their current conflict and differing opinions; however, nothing was determined. In 1908, Stanislavsky discovered that the Maly offered Nemirovitch the position of manager. Upon learning this information, Stanislavsky resigned from the board and they came to a new agreement concerning Stanislavsky's commitments to the MAT. In addition to contractual duties, Stanislavsky would put on one play each season without any intervention.[105] Despite the offer from the Maly, Nemirovitch remained at the MAT, although the relationship between the two men remained tense even until Stanislavsky's death in 1938.

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[103] Mikhail Bulgakov, *Black Snow*, trans. Keith Reddin (New York: Dramatist Play Services, 1998).

[104] Benedetti, "Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre 1898-1938," 270.

[105] Ibid., 270

Later, Nemirovitch's announcement to the MAT of the adoption of Stanislavsky's System can thus be seen as an attempt at reconciliation with Stanislavsky. In 1911, at the first pre-rehearsal meeting of *The Living Corpse*, Nemirovitch announced that Stanislavsky's new methods must be learned and practiced by the MAT's main group of actors.[106] These new methods used in the System would remain unknown to those outside the MAT and the First Studio.

Due to fear of criticism, Stanislavsky was quite secretive about his experimentation with his First Studio actors and early methods of teaching. He prohibited the actors from discussing the beginnings of his System with outsiders.[107] Many former MAT members and his students, including Michael Chekhov, Richard Boleslavsky, and Maria Ouspenskaya, later taught his methods worldwide. Unfortunately, certain parts of his teachings were distorted or over-emphasized by these second hand accounts, as well as confused by translations of his own writings.

Revolutionary Period: 1911 – 1923

The friction between the two founders left the MAT vulnerable at a time when unification was vital for its success and continuation. During the following decade, the MAT experienced another revolution, along with tightening control by a new government, Civil War, hunger, and changes to the economy resulting from those experiences. Russia was becoming an ever more powerful threat to Germany. As World War I drug on, interrupting modernization and exhausting the nation, Russia was ready for revolution.

[106] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art,* 525-6.
[107] Gordon, 11.

The Russian people were ready for peace and an end to their part in the Great War, as seen through the popular slogan “Peace and Bread.” According to Norman Stone, the economy might have been capable of continuing the war effort, but Russian society could no longer bear the strain.[108] Exhausted from the war and a lack of food, the Russian army lost the will to fight and joined the local population in the revolution, effectively disintegrating the home front. Even with the German enemy upon them, the Russian people lost their conviction to fight and no longer represented a unified front. With the government’s failure to interpret the desires of the masses and allow for resolution to the war, monarchy was overthrown as result of the Second Russian Revolution in March 1917.

During the Second and Third Revolutions (1917) in Russia, the changing atmosphere impacted the MAT. The most noticeable transformations included dividing the political allegiance of the company and a new “worker” audience. Support for the Bolshevik Revolution was divided amongst the company. Richard Boleslavsky, Jilinsky, and Maria Germanova were passionately opposed to Soviet beliefs, while Vakhatangov and Smishlayev welcomed the new order.[109] Although the MAT was created with the original intent of being a “popular” theatre, the founders of the theatre were determined to remain outside politics, hoping that their support for neither the old or new government would keep them out of the limelight and allow for the continuation of the MAT under the new government.

The Bolshevik Revolution radically changed the social composition of the country and the audience of the theatre. After the Third Revolution, the theatre lost its old

[108] Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 282.
[109] Gordon, 12.

intelligentsia and bourgeois audiences and opened to the soldiers, working class, and peasants—all of whom had never had such experiences before.[110] Anyone who had received a ticket from their place of work or institution could attend the performances of the MAT.[111] This new audience did not know or understand the norms of accepted behavior in the theatre before, during, and after performances. According to Stanislavsky, they had to teach these new theatre goers basic theater etiquette;

> to teach this new spectator how to sit quietly, how not to talk, how to come into the theatre at the proper time, not to smoke, not to eat nuts in public, not to bring food into the theatre and eat it there, to dress in his best so as to fit more into the atmosphere of beauty that was worshipped in the theatre.[112]

Teaching its audiences the manners and customs of the theatre presented a new challenge for the theatre to adapt and overcome in order to survive the changing tides.

The Civil War in Russia (1917-1921) further divided the country and also the MAT. A group of MAT actors led by Kachalov embarked on a small tour to the south of Russia and the Ukraine. Since the MAT was closed during the summer, this group left on this tour to briefly flee the hardships, including food shortages, in Moscow.[113] The group included actors Olga Knipper-Chekhova, Maria Germanova (joining them at the end of 1919), Vasily Kachalov, I. Krasnopol'skaya, M.Kryzhanovskaya, P. Pavlov, V. Pavlova, N. Aleksandrov, V. Orlova, P. Baksheev, S. Komissarov, V. Vasiliev,P. Sharov, N. Litovtseva , and the stage designer Ivan Germislavsky. The group of MAT actors became isolated and unable to return to Moscow because of the changing fronts. On the 24th of June in 1919, the Kachalov group was in the city of Khar'kov and, upon the

[110] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 555-556.
[111] Ibid., 554.
[112] Ibid., 554-555.
[113] Sergei Ostrovsky, "Maria Germanov and the Moscow Art Theatre Prague Group" in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 87-88.

approach of the White Army troops of General Denikin, the Red Army retreated. They were in White territory, and therefore unable to cross the front and return to the Red Army's territory in which Moscow resided.[114]

At the end of the Civil War, the group deliberated on their return to Moscow. During their absence, the MAT, which remained in Moscow, had to replace the actors with people from the Studios.[115] Because of the danger still present, as the Civil War had only recently concluded, and since the MAT's 1920-1921 season had been planned without the consideration of the Kachalov group, the troop decided to postpone their return to Moscow.[116] The Kachalov group travelled for two more years in Europe. In 1922, and after many requests from the main body of the MAT, the Kachalov group split. Kachalov, Knipper-Chekhova, Litovtseva, and Bersenev returned to Moscow, while Maria Germanova and others decided to defect, forming the Prague Group of the MAT.[117]

With the end of Civil War and "War Communism," Lenin took the country in a different, more flexible, direction with a New Economic Policy, or NEP (1921-1929). With the limited introduction of capitalism into the economy, theatres in Russia were forced to sell tickets to ensure their survival.[118] With the loss of the family textile business in the Revolution, Stanislavsky returned to the stage as an actor, since his only income now came from his performances with the MAT.

Again, as in 1905, political and economic turmoil made the MAT ready to tour outside of Russia to Berlin, Paris, and America—despite the economic hardships faced

[114] Sergei Ostrovsky, "Maria Germanov and the Moscow Art Theatre Prague Group," 87-88.
[115] Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, 557.
[116] Ostrovsky, 93-4.
[117] Ibid., 94
[118] Gordon, 13.

by the company after the Bolshevik Revolution and the return of part of the Kachalov group. Although they would have liked to have extended the tour to other countries within Europe and Canada, many countries would not have them because of the suspicion that surrounded the MAT's association with the Bolshevik regime.

Conclusion

Problems of governmental upheaval, warfare, hunger, finances, censorship, season abandonment, and a changing audience all plagued the MAT from its inception and continued through the 1923 and 1924 touring seasons. During a time of respite from the many challenges, Stanislavsky was able to begin work on his System, a process to train actors that he would spend his lifetime fine-tuning. He relied heavily on the MAT's handyman and master of many trades, Suler, as well as techniques gained from the practice of yoga and the works of Theodule Armand Ribot on the physiological condition. For an unknown reason, many theatre writers have overlooked the assistance provided to Stanislavsky during the earliest foundations of the System and his inspirations. The obsession to create a new approach to acting, among other reasons, caused tension among the two founders—yet another complication faced by the theatre's earliest periods. Despite difficulties and barely scraping by financially at times, the MAT persevered (and remains an eminent institute today). With the obstacles that lay before them, the MAT took charge of its own destiny and, with the opportunities presented, gained world acclaim.

CHAPTER 4

AMERICAN TOUR

1923 – 1924

After long negotiations, beginning in 1922, between American producer and promoter Morris Gest, the MAT, and the Russian Government, they came to an agreement on an American tour to begin in January 1923. This became the crown jewel in Gest's career in American theatre. For instance, never again would American audiences have the original MAT troupe's performances at their fingertips. Moreover, no such foreign theatre troupe's tour has ever left such a lasting impression on the cultural consciousness of Americans, especially in regard to American theatre.

However, while American theatre was still developing and ready for new innovations, the success of this tour was not guaranteed. For one, the Russian performers still had to overcome rather large obstacles in the language barrier and political suspicion. In order to determine how such a legacy was possible, one must first look at motivations for its tour, the reception, and what Stanislavsky and the actors did while on American soil.

Russian and American Motives for the 1923 Tour

The MAT agreed to an American tour for many of the same reasons as in 1905, when the theatre determined on a 1906 European tour. By leaving Russia, the company could avoid the political and economic turmoil, which was exceptionally hard on the actors, going on inside their homeland; they also hoped to gain capital the MAT desperately needed, as their funds began to dwindle and diminish quickly. And even

though the MAT continued to put on shows for mostly full houses while still in Russia, they were to unreceptive and uneducated audiences for little financial gain.

Gest's offer to tour the United States fit the MAT's needs for capital and retreat at an ideal time. According to Oliver Sayler, "The artists of the Russian theatre in particular have found in us a refuge and a haven. Moscow, Petrograd, New York! The Russian theatre has discovered a third home."[119] This third home also provided the actors with a receptive audience; while in Russia, esthetics of MAT faced difficulties in successful communication with new audiences at home. More importantly, it was a way to save actors, as the theatre's crew faced hunger and the theatre struggled financially due to the economic changes and internal strife within Russia. The following statement from Stanislavsky describes the general feelings and motivations of the MAT actors, as well as an idealistic hope for the future:

> We are laying up a fortune which will provide for out theatre during many years of the difficult transitional revolutionary period in Russia. It will help us to uphold and preserve everything we have done in our art for some centuries to come. America will understand and love our art, our ties will grow stronger, and peace and well-being of all lands and peoples will all but be restored.[120]

In conditions of extreme economic and political upheaval in Russia, the motivation for leaving Russia is fairly clear; however, why would Americans want a group of Russians to visit and risk spreading Bolshevik propaganda when their government had a rocky relationship with the Bolshevik regime to begin with? And more importantly, why and how did the MAT obtain permission to tour America in 1923-1924?

The Position of the Soviet Government, which was now in full control over all spheres of life in Russia, was ambiguous. On one side, the argument that the Russian

[119] Oliver M. Sayler, *The Story of the Moscow Art Theatre 1898-1923*, 6.
[120] Anatoly Smeliansky, "In Search of El Dorado: America in the Fate of the Moscow Art Theatre" in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 53.

government supported the arts and wanted to show that culture could still flourish under communist rule, while valid, cannot be confirmed. According to Schverbovich (whose memoirs, not yet translated, provide a Russia perspective of the American tours), the Soviet government wanted to prove that the MAT was as powerful and talented as in 1906, and that they supported the theatre's artistic abilities. It was the MAT's "patriotic task" to prove to the world that the theatrical art and culture could "flourish" after the Soviet Liberation.[121]

> Strange as it may sound today, it had to be proven that the MAT was as powerful as before and that the Soviet government supported its artistic strength. This was the patriotic task of our theatre, whereby we demonstrated the world at large that the theatrical art exists under the Soviet rule and therefore culture in general can exists and even flourish." [122]

Through the influence and international prestige of the MAT, the Soviet government felt that such a tour might improve the image of Soviet Russia. Therefore, it was a factor in the government's decision; although, there is no concrete proof to support this other than the word of MAT's artists.

On the other side, in view of massive emigration, the government could fear that some actors and artists would flee in America and thus undermine the image of the USSR. In addition, Russians were concerned the actors would misrepresent or voice opinions in opposition to Soviet believe, or provide examples of incidents casing a negative light on the USSR. To avoid defection and disobedience, Soviet officials held Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, as well as other MAT representatives, in a sense, as hostages in Russia and received guarantees of the return of the MAT's touring group ("any opposition on their part toward the new government might lead to swift retaliatory

[121] Smeliansky, 45.
[122] Ibid., 45.

action").[123] Originally, the agreement called for the group, under the leadership of Stanislavsky, to return in September 1923 to celebrate Moscow's silver jubilee.[124]

For the Americans, those in the theatrical community, as well as an educated few, knew of the prestige the MAT gained from its 1906 tour and were excited to host the theatre group. The United States had the privilege of hosting several foreign artists and émigré performers, such as Chauve-Souris, but never had they received a fully intact foreign theatre troupe of the size and reputation of the MAT.[125] The reputation alone of the MAT was enough for theatre aficionados, but would it be enough for the general public?

News about the MAT's 1906 tour piqued an interest in many theatre aficionados in America. Soon, stories of their realistic portrayals and stage settings filtered into the United States through many sources, including news articles, American travelers, émigré artists, and British Theatre practitioner Gordon Craig. Shortly after the German tour commenced, newspapers and magazines in the United States began publishing articles regarding this revolutionary group. Such interest was prominent in an article titled "Idols of the Russian Masses", written by Christian Brinton for *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. In April 1906, Brinton described the development of Russian theatre as well as the creation of the MAT and Stanislavsky's method. "His methods are the methods of human nature seen through the medium of a clear, discriminating mind. Though an inflexible realist, what he demands is not reality, but the closest, tensest, most faithful translation of life." Although this article may not have been remembered, the many who read it were left with a strong impression and awe of the MAT.

[123] Smeliansky, 50.
[124] Sayler, *The Story of the Moscow Art Theatre 1898-1923*, 6.
[125] Ibid., 6.

American traveler and theatre aficionado Oliver Sayler visited Russia during the 1917 Russian Revolution and provided American readers with a first-hand account on the state of the Russian theatre in his book, *The Russian Theatre under the Revolution*. Many Americans and other theatre experts questioned the ability of the Russian theatres to survive such a cataclysm as eight years of war, Revolution, hunger, and Civil War, since the theatres of England, France, and even the United States faltered when the state of affairs soured within their respective countries. Theatre was an extravagance and an irrelevant distraction that most could not afford in such a catastrophe. Sayler waited for the Russian theatres to re-open, watching for postings near the MAT's doors and hoping for any news. People finally returned to the MAT's offices in Russia on November 29, 1917. Sayler presented himself to the MAT, once the offices had reopened, and explained the purpose of his visit. This greatly moved Stanislavsky, and he worried the current state of Russia would cause Sayler to prematurely end his trip without first visiting the Studios, where, according to Sayler, "here centered his pride and his affection."

Between November 1917 and March 1918, Sayler attended eighty-seven performances of Russian Theatres. Despite a given performance being full, the MAT always found a seat for Sayler when he presented himself only five minutes before the curtain call. Although Sayler provided no examples of MAT techniques and no mention of Suler in his book, he did attempt to explain a reason for the MAT's survival: "The Russian theatre has persisted, therefore, not because it is a relief from life, an underground retreat where one could escape the agonies and the duties and the burdens of life. To the Russia, the theatre is rather a microcosms, a concentration and

an explanation of life." Publication of Sayler's book in 1920 helped to pave the way for the tour and MAT recognition in the United States.

While the newspapers and magazines scratched the surface of the essence of the MAT, accounts from travelers and those who personally worked with Stanislavsky best described, and provided insight on, Stanislavsky's methods and workings. Most sources, however, did not provide examples of Stanislavsky's methods until the arrival of émigré artists, like Boleslavsky, and the actors of MAT's American tour.

Build Up: Negotiations, Preparations, and Suspicion

The tour was the result of the invitation made on the part of Russian immigrant, Morris Gest. Gest arrived in the United States in 1893 at the age of twelve. He immigrated by himself from his hometown of Kosedary, which is near Vilna, Russia, and stayed with distant relatives upon his arrival.[126] Born Moischa Gershovitch, Gest was not interested in learning a trade in Russia, and was considered the "black sheep" of his conservative family. While in New York, the allure of the theatre drew him in.

Before bringing the MAT to America, Gest succeeded in bringing the wildly popular revue troupe Chauve-Souris from the Soviet Union, which former MAT member Nikita Balieff directed, in 1922.[127] A relationship formed between Balieff and Gest, and the success of the Chauve-Souris in the United States was a persuasive factor in convincing Stanislavsky and, by extension, the MAT to trust Gest.[128] On behalf of Gest, Balieff wrote to Stanislavsky on May 17, 1922, convincing him to trust Gest and tour

[126] John A. Pyros, *Morris Gest, Producer-impresario in the American Theatre* (New York: New York University, 1973), 1 & 5-6.
[127] Gordon, x.
[128] Pyros, 20.

America; furthermore, she stressed to Stanislavsky that his attendance was crucial in that his name on the poster would be paramount.[129] This correspondence played a large role in building the relationship between the company and the American producer.

In parallel to Hoover's ARA campaign to donate food to the starving Russian population, Gest raised $10,000 at a benefit for the needy families of the MAT on April 9, 1922. An article published in June 22, 1922, titled "Russia Brings Thanks", made note of these developments and the negotiations then taking place between the theatre and Gest.

> Nikolai A. Ruminantseff, a representative of the Moscow Art Theatre, is in New York. He brought a special message to Nikita Balieff and Morris Gest, and through them to the American artist of the theatre and the American public, thanking all concerned for the food remittances sent the players of the Moscow theatres and their children as a result of the benefit performance of Balieff's "Chauve-Souris" on April 9. Mr. Ruminantseff while here will make arrangements for a series of performances in New York in October by the Moscow Art Theatre company.[130]

Slightly less than a month later, the same newspaper, *The Evening World Wall Street Final Edition*, noted that Ruminantseff had returned again and would take back to Russia a proposition made by Gest for an American tour;

> Daily since he arrived here, Mr. Ruminatseff has been in conference with Mr. Gest and Nikita Balieff of the *Chauve-Souris*, and numerous cables have been sent to the company in Moscow. Indeed, Mr. Gest assures us his cable bill in this connection will be $2,500. If the company comes here its plays will present in the Russian language.[131]

The relationships formed and the outreach to assist the Russian actors and their families helped convince the MAT to trust Gest, as he assured the Board of Directors

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[129] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 400.

[130] Bide Dudley, "Russia Brings Thanks," *The Evening World Wall Street Final Edition*, June 22, 1922.

[131] Dudley, "About Plays and Players," *The Evening World Wall Street Final Edition*, July 18, 1922.

that American theatre goers would be receptive to the Russians. Additionally, the commercial success of the Chauve-Souris eased their fear of a language barrier and how they would be treated.

The negotiations between Gest and the MAT, as accounted by Oliver Sayler in his news article, "When Moscow and New York Negotiate", were a lengthy process. In part because the proposal for an American tour that business manager Nikolai Rumintseff brought back to Russia had then to be agreed to by the entire company.[132] Stanislavsky boasted, in a letter to his son, Igor, written August 22, 1922, that upon the MAT's refusal to Gest's terms, Gest anxiously accepted the MAT's counter proposal: "8,000 dollars (16,000 rubles) a week (8 performances) and another 50% of the profits."[133] Despite the excitement of what seemed like large sums of money, the MAT would still be in financial trouble after the first American tour in 1923.

Getting Ruminatseff to the States proved extremely difficult, as did convincing the Russians to send him, owing much to the negotiations in which Balieff took part. Obtaining permission for the Russian representative's entrance into the United States was no easy feat, as the countries involved had no diplomatic relations. Gest travelled to Washington D.C. to receive the necessary documentation for Ruminatseff's visit.[134] In addition to the difficulties in obtaining the proper documentation for the MAT's business manager, Gest spent over $2,500 on the cables to Moscow in order to progress

[132] *Oliver M. Sayler, "*When Moscow and New York Negotiate*," The New York Times,* July 16, 1922.

[133] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 400.

[134] *Sayler*, "When Moscow and New York Negotiate."

negotiations.[135] A cablegram finally arrived from Russia after seven months of negations, saying,

> Your invitation to Moscow Art Theatre to come to America is accepted and plans for trip have been ratified by agreement of entire company. […] According to the plans referred to in the cable the Moscow Art Theatre will arrive early in January for a limited engagement of eight weeks. They will appear only in New York. […] At the head of the company when it comes to this country will be the two artistic and executive directors of the theatre even since its beginning - its sole founders, in fact - Constantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko. Stanislvsky, incidentally, is Russia's leading actor and is accounted the greatest trainer of actors of this generation in Russia. The entire first line of players will accompany these two leaders, including Mme. Olga Knipper, widow of the playwright Tchekov; Maria Germanova, Maria Zhdanova, Lydia Korenlova, Olga Baklanova and Helena Suhatcheva, Vassily Katchaloff, leading actor after Stanislavsky; Ivan Moskvin, Vassily Luzhsky, Leonid Leonidoff, Vladimir Gribunin, Alexander Vishnevsky, Nikolai Massalitinoff and many others. Four out of the six or seven plays for the New York repertory have agreed upon; "Tsar Fydor Ivanovitch," […] "The Lower Depths," […] "Night Lodging"; and "The Three Sisters" and "The Cherry Orchard" […] Although, of course, all of the productions will be made in Russian, careful English translations are being prepared of all the plays to presented here. These translations will be published in inexpensive form before the company arrives, and purchasers of the tickets will be enabled to buy copies of the text of the plays at the same time.[136]

Of course, by the time the group arrived in New York, many of these original arrangements had changed: they toured in other cities in addition to New York, Nemirovitch was unable to attend, and the tour lasted more than eight weeks.

In looking at the legacy the MAT's tour left behind, it is clear this was a great success for Gest's career. It was the first time the United States had "reached out to the artistic products of a distant land without first requiring the stamp of approval of Paris and London on the product," thus marking a significant step in the growth of American theatre.[137] In addition, the MAT's performances in New York received the

[135] Dudley, "About Plays and Players."
[136] Walter Duranty, "Russian Players Coming to America: Moscow Art Theatre Company Leaves Soon on Tour, Reaching Here in January," *The New York Times*, August 28, 1922.
[137] *Sayler, "When Moscow and New York Negotiate."*

largest number of advance sales in the history of Broadway to date.[138] Stanislavsky honored Gest in 1927 when he declared Gest an honorary member of the MAT for his part in the American tour.[139] Gest died in 1942 at the age of sixty-one.[140]

Preparations for an American tour took place in Russia and the United States, and included promotion, travel plans, and rehearsals. Gest began to promote the tour as soon as the negotiations ended and all parties signed the papers in the spring of 1922.[141] A couple noticeable News articles promoting the MAT's 1923 tour in America were written by the American journalists Walter Duranty and Rebecca Drucker.

Duranty's article, "Russian Players Coming to America: Moscow Art Theatre Company Leaves Soon on Tour, Reaching Here in January" was one of the first news articles, published August 28, 1922. In this work, Duranty gave a brief description of the MAT and its popularity in Moscow, and some details of the upcoming tour—naming the actors and the repertoire which would appear in the States, as well as publishing the reply of agreement received from Moscow.[142] This article sparked the excitement of theAmerican audience.

News of the MAT's imminent appearance continued until their arrival in the United States. In December, the *New York Tribune* published an article titled "Transplanting Old Russia in Broadway Soil" by Rebecca Drucker. This was to provide New York audiences with a brief history of the theatre, the players, and the productions they were to see in a month's time.

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[138] Gordon, x.
[139] Pyros, 25.
[140] Ibid., 29.
[141] Gordon, x.
[142] Walter Duranty, "Russian Players coming to America."

In addition to promoting the MAT within the United States, Gest arranged some of the Russian players' travel plans, including, sending his brother, Simeon, and own son to accompany the MAT to act as companions and translators in their transatlantic crossing.[143] Russian preparations also took place immediately after agreeing upon an American tour, such as preparing a repertoire, rehearsing these plays, and arranging tours to play in Central and Western Europe while en route. In an atmosphere of political tension between countries, news about Russian theatre was met both with enthusiasm and suspicion.

The American press doubted whether or not a Communist Government would allow or "foster stage originality," in spite of the book of Sayler on the state of Russia's theatres.[144] From the start, a group of Americans calling themselves The American Defense Society began to raise suspicion in the States against the Soviet Theatre group. The Defense Society alleged that the MAT obtained permission to leave Russia with the agreement to pay the Soviet Government a third of their total earnings, in addition to agreeing not to spread propaganda against the Soviet Government and those who "agreed to conduct propaganda for the Soviets will be shown special preference."[145] While the actors may have secretly signed such an agreement to spread Soviet propaganda, they would have done so in order to receive permission to leave—with no plans of following through on that agreement.

Gest denied such allegations in the newspapers against the Russian group, saying the MAT had no connection to the Soviet Government and no such financial

[143] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 407.
[144] "Art and the Soviet," *The Evening World*, November 2, 1922.
[145] "Calls Art Theatre Agent of Soviets: American Defense Society Protests on American Tour by Moscow Players," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1922.

arrangement had been made. He insisted that the United States Government investigated the situation extensively before issuing visas on the passports of the members of the MAT.[146] The MAT continued to insist it was apolitical, with Stanislavsky declaring "The theatre's only propaganda is propaganda for art […] and has no financial obligations to the Soviet government."[147] Moreover, other news articles refuting these accusations went on to say that in the American contract there was no financial commitment to the Soviet Union and that any papers the MAT's actors were forced to sign would have been a "mere unavoidable formality."[148]

In reality, the MAT did have a special obligation it was required to fulfill: the Organization of Foreign Artistic Trips required the MAT to put on a charity performance every month while in the United States on the behalf of the Commission to Fight the Effects of the Famine (Pomgol). While the contract with Gest made no such arrangements, the MAT fulfilled its obligations by donating the profits from one performance to the American Red Cross.[149] It is highly doubtful that these financial obligations to the Soviet Government were what The American Defense Society had in mind.

News of the accusations against them reached the MAT company while in Paris. Stanislavsky was "swooped down" upon and intensively "interrogated" by reporters about the claims of the American Defense Society.[150] The MAT was comforted, in part, by a welcoming petition signed and sent to the Russian theatre group by many leading actors and actresses in America who wanted to see them perform. Among those who

[146] "Calls Art Theatre Agent of Soviets."
[147] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 427.
[148] "Defends Trip Here of Moscow Art Troupe," *The New York Times*, December 27, 1922.
[149] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 421.
[150] Ibid., 407.

signed the petition sent to the Russians were Ethel Barrymore, Laurette Taylor, Lenore Ulric, Helen Menken, Grace George, Ina Claire, John Barrymore, Glenn Hunter, O.P. Heggle, Madge Kennedy, Florence Reed, and Ben-Ami.[151] It was inspiring for Russian actors, but the suspicion of this tour continued.

Later on, while on tour in America, England decided to reject the MAT's admittance (April 1923), followed by a similar rejection from Canada (in December 1923).[152] According to Stanislavsky in a letter to Nemirovitch-Dantchenko while in Philadelphia, the Canadians' "official explanation [is] that we are Bolsheviks."[153] In addition, the Russian population of the Soviet Union was suspicious of the MAT's European and American tours. How much of the capitalist countries' ideal or culture would tarnish or corrupt the Russian Theatre group? This left the MAT to worry about how these tours and their return would turn out.

It was almost a miracle that in such tense relations between two countries, in the face of Red Scare, with fear from the Soviet government and mutual distrust, the tour finally came to fruition. Solidarity of United States' actors is remarkable here. Moreover, the reception of the productions given by the MAT after arrival pleasantly surprised Stanislavsky, despite the sometimes negative accusations and press coming out of America.

Arrival: Russian Impressions and American Reception

The MAT departed Russia for Stettin, Germany to begin their tour. The Soviet Government funded the ship at an expense of 333,000,000 rubles, according to

[151] "Stars Want to See Russian Players," *The New York Times*, December 12, 1922.
[152] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 424 & 435.
[153] Ibid., 435.

American newspapers.[154] From Germany, the MAT made their way to Paris before reaching their final and intended destination, America, in January 1923. The company travelled across the Atlantic Ocean aboard the *RMS Majesty* with a total of 62 members.

Stanislavsky's appearance in New York coincided with his sixtieth birthday.[155] He was disappointed to have missed the Statue of Liberty on his arrival into New York's harbor due to a barrage of questions by an interviewer. Waiting for the MAT were many familiar faces of former MAT members, including Nikita Balieff and Richard Boleslavsky.[156]

In the States, the MAT company was extremely busy, visiting many cities, including New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Pittsburg, New Haven, Hartford, Newark, Cleveland, and Detroit. In a letter to Nemirovitch written March 23, 1923 his secretary, Bokshanskaya, described the backbreaking pace the Russian company took up,

> So from April 3 to May 19 in three cities, 67 performances. As you can see, dear Vladimir Ivanovich, life is not easy for us with 9-10 performances a week, on tour as well in unknown cities. We shall even be playing in Holy Week and the first day of Easter at the same tempo. Holidays for us are working days.[157]

Overall, the MAT's reception in America impressed and excited Stanislavsky, despite his initial fears of acceptance and that the United State was not a "normal" place.[158] He was quick to note that although no real theatre existed at that time in this

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[154] Cyril Brown, "Soviet Provides Ship for Actors: Moscow Art Theatre Troupe Will Sail at a Cost of 333,000,000 Rubles," *The New York Times*, September 3, 1922.
[155] Smeliansky, 53.
[156] Elena Poliakova, "In Time, Out of Time: The Moscow Art Theatre's American Tours" in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 36.
[157] Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* 317-9.
[158] Smeliansky, 54.

country, but he got a positive impression of the people. In his own words, “The people are enchanting, affectionate, naïve, good-natured, eager for knowledge, not at all self-important, devoid of European snobbery. They look you in the face and are ready to accept anything new and genuine.”[159] This provided all the more opportunity for Stanislavsky to teach and bestow his own ideas upon the American theatrical consciousness.

American cultural soil appeared to be receptive and welcoming to new visitors. This Russian System of acting Stanislavsky brought to America, and later taught by former MAT and First Studio actors, transformed American acting within a generation, changing both the Broadway stage and the growing Hollywood film industry. The MAT got hearty support from United States spectators, critics, and even U.S. leaders. The MAT performances, which sold out regularly, were a hit amongst American audiences. Moreover, American President, Calvin Coolidge, invited Stanislavsky to meet him; a recognition on the highest political level.[160] In addition to the popular support for the Russian group, American theatre critics wrote glowing analyses in approval of the MAT’s performances in 1923.

Shortly after arriving in New York, local papers began to evaluate the Russian group’s work. *The New York Tribune* published a review, “The Plays”, written by J. Ranken Towse on January 9, 1923, which described the group in triumphant tone: “the much vaunted Moscow Art Theatre has come, seen and conquered.”[161] Towse’s statement on the MAT best captures the general feeling of the earliest reviews written on the Russians. Heywood Braun declared the Russian actors Ivan Moskvin and

[159] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 419.
[160] Gordon, xi.
[161] J. Ranken Towse, “The Plays,” *The New York Tribune*, January 9, 1923.

Vassily Katchaloff better than any past or present American actor.[162] Perhaps the review "The Death of Pazukin" written by Even L.W. (an anonymous reporter) best described how the suspicion surrounding the Russian theatre did not keep audiences from coming and enjoying the MAT's performances. The critique, published 10 months after the MAT's arrival to New York, also shed light on the state of the American stage at the time.[163]

> As one who had never attended the performances out of sheer patriotism and disgust at bellicose Russian artism, we hereby eat dirt. For us, at any rate a new standard of acting for those fed upon the American stage, to understand what heights this art can reach. It is impossible to convey, in meager and hurried description of this sort the juicy, full ripe nature of the interpretive ability of these players." [164]

The appraisal for the MAT spilled over into popular magazines, such as *Vanity Fair*. In March 1923, Alexander Woollcott covered the group's American tour and their performances. He believed that their performances were the best productions he had seen. Not only were the actors able to replicate reality on stage, but, according to Woollcott, the players worked well together.[165]

One of the MAT's primary concerns for an American tour was the problem of language; their plays were all performed in Russian. Gest assured the MAT of the large Yiddish speaking population, including himself, in America; however, The MAT members still felt their reception in America would be affected by a language barrier. Besides the successful sales at the box office, the statements written in American newspapers provide an insight into this foreseen problem.

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[162] Heywood Braun, "The New Plays," *New York World*, January 23, 1923.
[163] Even L.W., "The Death of Pazukin," *New York Herald*, November 23, 1923.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Gordon, x.

"The Death of Pazukin" describes the audience laughing through the MAT's performances, despite some of the spectators not understanding a single word spoken by the actors.[166] Pleasantly surprised at the MAT's acceptance by Americans, Stanislavsky said that "In America even if you don't know the language you feel completely at home. It's easy to speak and shout in Russian. People just love it!"[167]

The MAT's Daily Life While on Tour in America

During the MAT's tour in America, despite their many productions and hurried schedule, the company and former members participating in the productions, such as Boleslavsky, stayed busy in other venues as well. They took part in attending charity functions, writing letters to the members left behind in Moscow, and Boleslavsky gave lectures on Stanislavsky's System. Furthermore, in his free time while in the States, Stanislavsky wrote his auto-biography, *My Life in Art*.

Books of translated letters, such as Benedetti's *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters* (1991) and Laurence Senelick's *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters* (2014) provide researchers with valuable information on the daily life of the Moscow Art Company and the touring members. The letters between Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch, for example, provide the clearest insight to the then current workings and state of the theatre during the American tour, as well as provide an interesting commentary on the situation back in Moscow. For example, while the tour seemed to be a financial success with its sold out shows, in reality the company was twenty-five thousand dollars in debt in the summer of

[166] Even L.W., "The Death of Pazukin."
[167] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 53.

1923.[168] Some of Nemirovitch's most revealing letters to Stanislavsky have not yet been opened and sit, still sealed, in the Russian archives.[169]

Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art* was written during the first American tour. Published in Boston for the first time anywhere in 1924, it covers the artist and director's life from birth until leaving for the American tour. Despite this abrupt ending, his auto-biography provides one of the best descriptions of the necessity for the 1923 & 1924 tours on the Russian side. The work is also vital for constructing his motivation and inspiration in creating his System of acting and teaching.

In convincing Stanislavsky to write his autobiography, publishers told the Russian director, as described in a letter to his daughter Kira and grand-daughter Kirilla, that it would be "eternal, meaning edition after edition, because it is full of pedagogical and directorial and actorial advice."[170] This assertion made by American's turned out to be entirely true; Stanislavsky's autobiography has continued to be read by actors and directors alike.

My Life in Art, Stanislavsky's first book, introduced readers to his world and invited them into his mind, as well as provided readers with the first view of his creative method. In May 1924, he published the book in the United States, only later to be published in Russia, and dedicated it to "hospitable America," expressing the author's thanks to the country's reception of the Russian actors. The book was later published in Russia, with some changes to terms and in its explanation of ideas in order to fit better within Soviet ideology.

[168] Benedetti, *Letters*, 316
[169] Smeliansky, 45.
[170] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 431.

Because of the success and the potential financial gain, Stanislavsky decided to continue their next season, which ran from November 23, 1923 to May 24, 1924, in the United States. Many theatre writers have portrayed the financial situation of the MAT as the result of the 1923 tour incorrectly. I believe these writers purely look at the sold out shows and tickets sold, rather than reading the primary documentation (particularly letters) which clearly state the financial break down of the tour and debt of the MAT. It was not a financial success; rather, Stanislavsky felt as if they had gained the trust and acceptance of American audiences and to leave when the door for higher financial gain had finally been opened would be a grave mistake. Stanislavsky felt that the funds gained from American audiences (a "dollar pump" as he described it) might help those who remained in Russia while they waited for state subsidy.[171] Nemirovitch acquired the permission from the Russian Government for the continuation of the MAT's presence in America for 1924.[172] In addition to the plays already presented in 1923, the MAT added Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and *Ivanov*, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Death of Pazukin*, A. N. Ostrovsky's *Enough Stupidity for Every Wise Man*, Henrik Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, and Carlo Goldoni's *The Mistress of the Inn*.[173]

Despite the impact the tour had on American culture, the 1924 tour did not enjoy the same success as the previous one. Americans love all things new. In the case of the MAT, while theatre aficionados continued to enjoy the performances, popular audiences felt that the Russians continued to present the same sort of productions, which were no longer quite so exotic and new. Therefore, the financial motivations for a second tour proved to be unfounded. In addition, the morale of the players worsened,

[171] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 419.
[172] Smeliansky, 57.
[173] Poliakova, 34.

and, according to Shverubovich, the company no longer cared and members accused each other of causing the disintegration of the touring group.[174]

In addition to the financial problems caused by the second tour, the Russian group looking forward to the possible return to the motherland had to deal with some large problems: the state of the theatre upon returning to Russia, how many of them would return, and whether such a theatre could exist in Soviet Russia. These unknowns, as well as uncertainty in Russia and the possibilities available in the United States, encouraged the desire of many of these actors to stay in America. In his letters to Nemirovitch, Stanislavsky named some of the artists who considered this option, including Bondarev, Lazarev, Baksheev, Ouspenskaya, Tamiroff, the Bulgakovs, Rumyantsev, and the Badulins.[175]

Nemirovitch cautioned the artists in America in a letter that in the current Russia, only a certain MAT could exist. As an example of this, Nemirovitch states, "if they get here and start to perform the earlier productions in the same old ways, then in three months the MAT will never recover from the lambasting it will receive."[176] Nemirovitch decided to fire some of the actors he felt could not quickly adapt to new methods and atmosphere of political change.

The touring group had agreed and signed that they would return to Moscow and perform on an arranged date, and those who failed to return would be considered by their government political defectors. The terminated actors would not be returning to Russia; therefore, in response to the removal of certain actors, Stanislavsky urged Nemirovitch to use "caution in informing me the names of the candidates for dismissal"

[174] Smeliansky, 59.
[175] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 437-441.
[176] Smeliansky, 64.

in his letter written April 7, 1924.[177] Nemirovitch fired Ouspenskaya, Tamiroff, and three others; through this process, in addition to other MAT emigrants, America gained some of the earliest teachers of Stanislavsky's teachings; the MAT lost some of its founding members and most famous actors.

Conclusion

Gest seized an opportunity to have the celebrated MAT, who had not toured outside Russia since 1906, perform in the United States. Other Russian troupes had wowed American audiences, but nothing in comparison to the MAT's scale and reputation. Despite the allure of the MAT, some Americans feared the spread of Bolshevik propaganda during a time when the American Government did not recognize the traveling artists' country of origin. To Stanislavsky's surprise, the MAT was welcomed and highly praised after its arrival. Despite the full houses of the first tour, the financial situation of the MAT was still dire. The failure of the second tour in 1924 would only worsen that predicament. Nevertheless, what the MAT lacked in financial gain it made up for in the legacy it left behind.

[177] Smeliansky, 64.

CHAPTER 5

IMPACT OF THE 1923 AND 1924 MOSCOW ART THEATRE TOURS ON RUSSIAN THEATRE 1923-1940

The influences of the 1923 and 1924 tours on Russian theatre and culture are harder to trace than the repercussions on American culture; furthermore, American and Russian theatre historians have not paid any attention to them. This development has occurred for many reasons; those purposes include the Soviet Government's refusal to publish anything which would insinuate that capitalist America affected their culture and the erasing of emigrating artists from the cultural histories published in Russia. Despite the lack of acknowledgement by both Russian and American writers, the 1923 and 1924 tours did change both the artists who toured and Soviet culture. The American tour tainted the image of the MAT at home and transformed the touring artists—including affecting their decision to return home or emigrate. In addition, had Stanislavsky decided to stay in America, his System never would have been accepted as the model for Socialist Realism in theater. Therefore, impacts from the American tour and the decisions made while on that tour forever changed Soviet and Russian theatre.

Hostility towards the MAT at Home

After the MAT returned May 1924, Stanislavsky felt as if he were cornered; everywhere the MAT turned in Russia they met mistrust, as if the theatre was contaminated by "bourgeois" culture abroad. This suspicion towards the MAT's American tour began immediately. In a letter written by Stanislavsky to Nemrovitch-Dantchenko on December 29, 1923, the Russian director complained that people in

Moscow criticized the MAT because they represented the "tradition of bourgeois theatre and because plays by Chekhov and other authors of the 'intelligentsia'" were popular among foreign populations they visited, causing them to show these plays most.[178] The Soviet newspapers at home described the popularity of the MAT among the European and American populations they visited as "birds of a feather flocking together."[179] A "bourgeois" (in the meaning sophisticated), high-brow theatre did not quite fit into the changing Soviet culture at the time, but could enjoy success amongst the capitalist audiences in America, according to these sources.

In addition, people in Moscow believed the MAT's performances were extremely profitable, and envied that they were "rolling in the dollars," meanwhile people in Russia were struggling and hungry.[180] While the tour was very successful from an artistic perspective, it was less fruitful financially. In fact, part of the earnings from the tour was donated to children in need from the Volga famine region (in addition to the donations made to the American Red Cross).[181]

Throughout the American tours, the Russian group constantly looked back to Moscow's reaction and the rumors surrounding their activities in the States, and then had to explain certain situations and/or publically apologize. The accusations coming out of Russia against Stanislavsky and the MAT deeply and personally offended him. The Russian director felt that his reputation after forty years of activity in the theatre

[178] Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* 319-20.
[179] Poliakova, 36.
[180] Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* 319-320.
[181] Smeliansky, 61.

profession and his original intention for the MAT to be a theatre for the people ought to have shielded him from such distrust.[182]

In an article published in New York by the *Novoe Russkoe Slovo,* a Russian emigrants' newspaper, Stanislavsky was accused of being appalled by the dirty and unkempt appearance of the American theatre workers who demanded plays of the revolutionary genre. The magazine *Krokodil*, and eventually other papers, reported these accusations to Russians.[183] Stanislavsky, at the insistence of Nemirovitch, telegrammed *Pravda* to explain the claims printed against him by the *Novoe Russkoe Slovo.* In the November 24, 1923 telegram, Stanislavsky stated that the reports by the Russian-American weekly newspaper were erroneous, claiming that in the company of many witnesses he had, in fact, asserted the reverse.[184]

In another instance of hostility at home, Nemirovitch forced Stanislavsky to again explain his actions when a picture surfaced of Stanislvasky, V.V. Luzhsky, and Olga Knipper-Chekhova standing next to Prince Yusupov at a charity event. The social event supporting Russian performers in America turned into a scandalous affair in Moscow. The report published with the picture alleged that Stanislavsky and the MAT were sneaking loot out of Russia to its enemies.[185] Therefore, when the MAT returned to Moscow it would have more battles to fight against those who doubted them. Some artists' decisions to return or not were certainly influenced by the hostility harbored against them at home. Such hostility may be explained by the radical opposition in the

[182] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 432.
[183] Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters*, 319.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Smeliansky, 50.

Soviet Union to bourgeois culture, exemplified by Proletkult, and general Soviet xenophobia.

The Decision to Emigrate or Return

After the MAT arrived in America, their spectacular performances assisted in melting away the apprehensive attitudes of the local population. The sites and opportunities available in the prosperous capitalist country impressed and lured many of the Russian visitors. In addition, the reception and success received in America by the MAT performers assisted in the decision of some to stay. But, some ex-MAT performers, like Boleslavsky, left Russia before the 1923 tour.

The decision to immigrate to "the land of opportunity" was not as easy as appearances allow. For the Russian actor, the departure from their homeland affected their professional careers—it meant a parting with their audiences, "one of the most appreciative audiences," and one that would understand the language they spoke.[186] But, the unknown and foreboding future of Russia, as well as the terrifying situations surrounding the 1917 Revolutions and war, clearly impacted the decision for some artists to leave Russia.

Furthermore, once the dust settled, the reception of the outstanding theatre artists and directors under Soviet rule could not be assumed. When Stanislavsky's life ended, many in the USSR recognized him as Russia's greatest theatre director and teacher, and adopted his methods and adapted them to the Soviet style of theatre. But loyalty was not a warranty against arbitrary repressions in the 1930s. For example, Vsevolod Meyerhold, another prominent director and former actor under Stanislavsky,

[186] Smeliansky, 86.

met his death in 1937 as a victim of terror, despite his pro-Bolshevik statements after the Revolution. Stanislavsky tried to intervene on behalf of Meyerhold, but Soviet authority would not tolerate his avant-garde techniques and his refusal to accept Socialist Realism. (Meyerhold was later pardoned in the first wave of de-Stalinization.)

Making the decision difficult was the fact that Russian émigrés virtually ceased to exist in the eyes of the Russian public due to the severed connections and the inability to mention their names or even that they had ever existed.[187] The authorities struck the names and the existence of such defectors from records in 1938, from the history of theatre and from the collection, *The Moscow Art Theatre in Illustration and Documents.* At the requirement of the censors, they edited the names of former cast members, such as Maria Ouspenskaya, out of the history of the MAT and the list of all the actors who had appeared in their performances. Despite this attempt to erase these artists from the MAT's history, the censors failed to notice the names in the cast lists that were included with the documents.[188]

Ignoring and omitting émigré artists from the past caused other problems for historians and researchers, even once the Soviet Government ended this practice in the late 1970s. The artist was totally isolated from the life and family they had once known in Russia if they decided to relocate. With the connection between the émigré and the Russian people interrupted, there was no information known of that person's existence after they left Russia—how their career was doing or if they were even still alive. The date of emigration replaced the death date often times when noting the birth and death

[187] Inna Soloviova, "Do You Have Relatives Living Abroad? Emigration as a Cultural Problem," in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992),70.
[188] Ibid., 70.

of a person who left the country.[189] This helps explain why the emigration of artists, and more specifically theatre performers, are ignored and often not researched; in the case of some works, such as Mark Raeff's *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939*, theatre actors were barely mentioned.

While the decision was a difficult one, the turmoil inside of Russia, the longing to make a better life for themselves, and the desire to preserve a small part of the culture of which they had once been a part, at least on "emigration island" (abroad), caused several of the MAT's most notable actors to relocate. Many of the MAT actors who remained in America, along with ex-MAT company members who left Russia prior to the 1923 tour, made it their mission to teach the techniques and traditions of the esteemed Russian theatre in the face of unpredictable chances of recognition in the Soviet Union.

This desire to teach on the part of many who came to America deeply impacted and assisted in the development of modern American theatre. Vadim Vasil'evich Scherbovich, son of Kachalov, who took part in the American tours and wrote one of the best memoirs concerning the 1923 and 1924 tours, explained that those who remained in America lived "off the crops sown by K. Stanislavsky in 1923-24, and fertilized by his book *My Life in Art*, which was published there."[190] Some Russian actors that could not overcome the language barrier or did not want to teach found a home amongst Hollywood and silent films prior to the era of talking films.

The decision to return to the Soviet Union proved equally hard. Stanislavsky received many offers and pleas from friends and acquaintances to emigrate from Russia. Numerous accusations and rude comments (told that they were not wanted

[189] Inna Soloviova, "Do You Have Relatives Living Abroad? Emigration as a Cultural Problem," 70.

[190] Smeliansky, 45.

and to never return home) continued to come out of their homeland.[191] The Russian actors of the MAT were in a difficult situation—to leave Russia meant alienation and a severed connection from the people and audiences they once knew, and to return meant a reception at home from some who wished they would not have come back.

This difficult decision can be seen in a letter from Stanislavsky to Nemirovitch as early as December 28, 1923, "Seeing all the abuse that's heaped on me in Moscow I am refusing all kinds of good offers coming my way from Europe and America and yearn with all my heart for Russia."[192] One may wonder if the last part of his statement about longing to return was genuine, or if it was included for fear of being read by someone other than Nemirovitch, for example OGPU.

While the founders may have known their letters were being opened by the OGPU, I think it is far more likely that Stanislavsky truly loved Russia and wanted to remain there. On March 6, 1906, while on tour in Berlin, he wrote to his brother Vladimir on the desire to return home. Although his trips were "uncommonly interesting, because you make the acquaintance of interesting people" whom you are unlikely to meet any other way, "there's no place like home."[193] Therefore, his decision being influenced by his fondness for Russia seems sincere when considering this letter written in 1906. While the Russia of 1906 no longer existed, it was still his home and a place he loved.

Stanislavsky's personal character influenced his return to Moscow, according to Inna Soloviova, instructor at the Moscow Art Theatre School. Accordingly, Stanislavsky's personality prevented him from doing that which might risk his reputation

[191] Smeliansky, 74.
[192] Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* 319.
[193] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 212.

or be viewed as inappropriate.[194] Although his disposition may have factored into the decision to return to Russia, I find it more likely that he, and the others who returned, wanted to impact and be a part of the changing Russian theatrical consciousness. In a letter written to Nemirovitch-Dantchenko after February 14, 1923, Stanislavsky excitedly exclaimed, "the political role of the MAT is enormous. It returned to Russia many Russians who had remained in America. Once they experienced the Russian soul, these Americanized Russians again burned with a desire to return to their homeland."[195] Therefore, the love of Russia, personal character, responsibility for his Moscow Arts Theatre, and the desire to play a role in the transformation of Russian culture influenced the decision for those who would return to Moscow. Regardless, Stanislavsky's decision to return to Russia is monumental considering that his System and style became the accepted tradition for Soviet Realism.

Soviet Russia's Theatre: 1920s – 1930s

Although the most significant changes to theatrical life in Russia came after 1928, the years of the Revolution and early Soviet rule were uneasy and resulted in the demise of many previous Russian theatre troupes. In 1920-1922 the MAT received requests for Communist and contemporary plays in their repertoire. In a letter to the Soviet People's Commissar of the Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky (Commissar of Enlightenment and Culture in Soviet government), Nemirovitch wrote:

> We accept the Revolution but we are afraid that this music of the new world will not find for a long time an expression in dramatic literature. In any case, we do not see it yet—and if we, the theater, will be offered dry, artificial, imperfect, stammering material, we will not be able to make it sound right—regardless of the fact that it may

[194] Soloviova, "Do You Have Relatives Living Abroad? Emigration as a Cultural Problem," 77.
[195] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters,* 420

> be strongly tuned in to high revolutionary ideas. We cannot lower our art and ourselves… it is impossible to force the musicians of high musical culture to play unripe, lifeless scores written by school boys.[196]

The American tours spared the MAT from pressure of Soviet officials to perform such vulgar plays until their return to Moscow and provided a safe haven to the Russian company, sparing them from the "material distress and political terror" many faced at home, as well as providing some financial stability during their absence.[197] These tours played a significant role in the survival of the theatre and its artists.

The MAT returned home to Moscow during the height of NEP (1921-1929) and found a very different cultural situation, as Nemirovitch-Dantchenko had warned. In 1923, the Soviet government created a committee, Glavrepertkom, to oversee and control theatre repertoire. That same year, Nemirovitch complained that Glavrepertkom banned some productions for being counter-revolutionary and un-Soviet, for example, "when there's a tsar (*Snow Maiden*) or figure of authority (*The Governor*) or when the past is beautiful or there's a church (*A Nest of the Gentry*) or whatever."[198] Although the Soviet government censored the theatres, management of Russian theatres remained haphazard and followed no single ideology until the creation of Socialist Realism in the 1930s.

Before the government cracked down on the theatres, Stanislavsky and Nemrovitch decided perform Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Days of the Turbins* (1926) in 1929. Bulgakov, who wrote the novel *The White Guard*, modified the book into the

[196] Slonim, 286-7.
[197] Ibid., 287.
[198] Inna Solovyova, "The Theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929-1953," in *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 326.

play.[199] Bulgakov's other novels include *The Master and Margarita* (published only in 1968) and *Heart of a Dog* (confiscated by the OGPU in 1926), and he was well known for the plays he contributed to the MAT (writing a total of thirty-two plays in his lifetime).[200] Considered counterrevolutionary by many, *The Days of the Turbins* depicted the White army as human beings with idealist motivations, rather than the generally accepted vilification of those in support of tsarist Russia in a Soviet narrative.

Luckily and unexpectedly for the Moscow Arts Theatre and Bulgakov, Stalin was not among those who considered the play counterrevolutionary.[201] Stalin felt that showing the enemy in this light did no harm and showed the Soviet citizens the intelligent enemy the Red army conquered; in a letter written by Stalin in February 1929 to V. Bill-Bielotserkovski he expressed these sentiments:

> "The Days of the Turbins" that is not such a bad work as it does more good than harm. Remember the deep impression the audience receives if favourable to the Bolsheviks. If even people like the Turbins are obliged to lay down their arms and submit to the will of the people and admit what they stand for is lost, the Bolsheviks are invincible…"The Days of the Turbins" demonstrates the mighty power of Bolshevism.

This letter also displayed the favoritism Stalin showed towards the MAT.

In 1928 the economic backpedaling of NEP came to an end. Under Stalin's Cultural Revolution (1928-1932), the country began to drastically reshape, tightening control on, and influencing every facet of, culture. This period in Russian history was much more crucial for the theatre than 1917, especially in looking at the prominent theatrical authorities (actors, writers, directors) who remained in their previous positions before Revolution. By the early 1930s, the Soviet government was better organized to

[199] Slonim, 269.
[200] Ibid., 297.
[201] Ibid., 297.

control and impose ideology onto the arts, as well as eliminate those who stood in the way or did not conform.

One way the Soviet government effectively controlled the Soviet Russian theatres was financially. After the 1917 Revolution, the tsar and rich, independent bourgeoisie people who sponsored the arts ceased to exist; the Soviet state gradually became the sole patron. In 1922, the theatres of Russia were fairly evenly divided amongst the state (thirty-three percent), co-operative (thirty-six percent), and private producers (thirty-one percent). By 1925-1926 that division shifted in favor of the state; sixty-three percent of theatres belonged to the state, leaving twenty-seven percent in the hands of co-operatives and ten to private producers.[202] The Agitprop (the Agitation and Propaganda) Section of the Central Committee declared that

> Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, when theatres are the property of the Soviet government… when we hold the means to regulate and direct their activities, such a state subsidies and the Glavrepertkom, all theatres…can move more or less quickly in a socialist direction, they can and must undergo a period of ideological and political reconstruction.[203]

This section of the Central Committee was created in the early 1920s and tasked with shaping and regulating appropriate information, official and educational in content, in addition to other responsibilities. Under these political conditions, theatres were forced to adapt; although, the ideological changes of Soviet authorities were not made clear until 1930-1932.

[202] Slonim, 288.
[203] Solovyova, "The Theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929-1953," 327.

The Development of Soviet Realism and Stanislavsky's System: 1930s

While it was clear theatre would not have the share of freedom allowed in the 1920s by the Soviet government, the limitations introduced in the Cultural Revolution by the party line and what was acceptable for artists was very confusing and inconsistent. Despite the confusion, if an artist read the signs incorrectly, they would suffer a fate far worse than the accusations Bulgakov and the MAT experienced after *The Days of the Turbins*.[204] During the 1930s and the periods of Terror in Russia, artists who did not follow the party line faced the possibility of arrest, imprisonment, and, in cases such as Meyerhold, torture and death.

Finally, between 1934 and 1936, a clearer direction of what the Soviet Government wanted could be seen by artists of Russia through the statement made by Andrei Zhdanov, a Party spokesman, and the newly introduced award of People's Artist of the Soviet Union. Zhdanov addressed his audience during the 1934 Writers Congress, describing the requirement of Soviet literature to follow the basic method of Socialist Realism, which required the artist to truthfully and historically represent (the Soviet perspective of) reality, in addition to educating the working class.[205] In his speech, he quoted Stalin, who defined the role of the artist was to be "the engineers of the soul."[206]

In 1936, the People's Artist of the Soviet Union award was created and was awarded to those whom the Government approved; included among those on the first

[204] Solovyova, "The Theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929-1953," 330.
[205] Slonim, 306.
[206] Solovyova, "The Theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929-1953," 328.

list were Stanislavsky, Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, and Kachalov.[207] Although one could look at the list and predict the direction their art should go in order to remain in, or go along with, the Party line, who would be repressed and when was impossible to anticipate.[208]

For the MAT to survive the transformation of culture sponsored by the state, Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, who always remained politically neutral, began to add a number of the better Soviet plays to the MAT's repertoire. Stalin favored Stanislavsky's realistic style and declared that Stanislavsky's System and realistic portrayals of life on stage be used as a model in which to base Soviet Realism in the theatrical realm.

In her work, *Moscow the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941*, Katerina Clark offered a thoughtful parallel between the official acceptance of Stanislavsky's System, which reached its height in 1938 with its attempt to reveal the hidden essence of a character on the stage, to the Great Purge Trial that year.[209] The Great Purge Trial took place in March 1938 against suspected followers of Trotsky, including Nikolay Bukharin and Aleksi Rykov. The purpose for the trials was to *unmask* the "enemies of the people" and the state, as well as show the Soviet citizens what the accepted normative behavior was.

It is extremely interesting that the seemingly different developments both reached prominence in the year 1938. Stanislavsky had begun to develop his theories and System in the early 1900s before the Soviet Government took power. He remained

[207] Solovyova, "The Theatre and Socialist Realism, 1929-1953," 330.
[208] Ibid., 331.
[209] Katerina Clark*, Moscow the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 224

outside politics as long as possible, not taking a side, and there is no recognizable sign of Marxism or Leninism inside of Stanislavsky's System.[210] In fact, Stanislavsky never strived to have his system be adopted as the theatrical standard of Socialist Realism or desired to be promoted at the expense of other artistic styles; he only wanted the MAT to survive. Therefore, many have viewed and accepted that the two occurrences in 1938, the acceptance of the System and the Great Purge Trial, were a pure coincidence.

Clark argues that Stanislavsky's System and specific ideas of his, despite the lack of Marxist/Leninist ideology, went well with the logic of historical events of 1938.[211] Stanislavsky's System promoted removing one's mask in acting and portraying one's deep emotions tapped into by using his methods. This idea, in particular, went along with the official discourse of the mid-nineteen-thirties: the anti-Formalist attack and the vigilance required of all citizens to unmask the "enemies of the people." In 1938, the year of Stanislavsky's death and the fortieth anniversary of the MAT, the System reached its peak acceptance and Stanislavsky was awarded the highest soviet honor, the Order of the Lenin.[212] Other arguments on the rise of Stanislavsky's System, its adoption, and Soviet theatres modeled upon the MAT example include the disgrace of Meyerhold with his "formalist" experimentation.[213]

Back to the 1920s, in America, Stanislavsky was disillusioned by the actors' attitudes. In a letter to Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, Stanislavsky complained that the actors were not interested in continuing to work on their craft and had no larger goal;

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[210] Clark, 225.
[211] Ibid., 225.
[212] Ibid., 225.
[213] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 251.

with actors like this, the ideas of the MAT and "work based on ideals cannot exist."[214] He explained the lack of motivation as the outcome of years under the oppressive conditions caused by Revolution or exhaustive wandering through Europe, in addition to the financial fears and uncertainty of future life.[215] Stanislavsky felt the values of the MAT gone forever and was deeply disheartened by the actors' mindset in America, in addition to being personally drained. Despite this, the recognition the MAT received in the U, was an important encouragement for Stanislavsky to continue development of his system. He returned to Moscow to continue work on his System, constantly experimenting and altering the most important aspects of his teachings.

Toporkov's account of his time spent at the MAT and under the tutelage of Stanislavsky from 1927 to 1938 in *Stanislavski: In Rehearsal* assists the researcher in discovering the changes to Stanislavsky's teachings made after returning to Russia. Toporkov was twenty-eight when he was accepted into the MAT. His work, written between 1949 and 1950, was the first in the Soviet Union to describe the teachings and work of Stanislavsky behind the scenes, aside from the director's own writings.[216] The book consists of describing the rehearsals for *The Embezzlers* (1928), *Dead Souls* (1932) and *Tartuffe* (1938). During this time in MAT history, Stanislavsky took more of a supervisory role with the productions; a director was assigned, the play was rehearsed, and then Stanislavsky would make changes until he was satisfied.[217]

It may appear to some that after the 1923 and 1924 tours, Stanislavsky changed his mind on some aspects of his system; in fact, he never disregarded any discovery he

[214] Smeliansky, 56.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Toporkov, ix-x.
[217] Ibid., ix-x.

made. The director was merely experimenting, seeking to improve his system and the quality of acting in Russia. Had Stanislavsky lived past seventy-five, he would have continued to experiment and tinker with acting methods.

Stanislavsky felt that it was an artist's job to never be satisfied and stagnant; rather, one should continue to work on one's self (as can be seen with his disappointment with the MAT actors on tour in America). According to Stanislavsky, if one did not work towards "mastering the laws of human creativity, of being able to influence and control that creativity, the capacity to reveal one's creative capabilities, one's intuition in every show," values upon which the MAT was founded, then the theatre "will decline, turn to nothing and our theatre will sink below the level of the usual hack theatres."[218]

Between 1906 and 1924, Stanislavsky's focus centered on emotional recall and the techniques to achieve it. After returning, Stanislavsky turned to a new technique, table talks—his own innovation. Most likely, it was a result of creative impulse which he got while on tour in America. From 1925 to 1928, actors sat around a table with Stanislavsky, and there an actor established a character's desires.[219] Before this, theatres used the table as a place to read through the script for the first time; after this, they would turn to the stage. Now, Stanislavsky, in attempting to improve rehearsals, stayed at the table and had the cast, under his management, analyze every aspect of the play.[220]

[218] Toporkov, 105-6.
[219] Gordon, 14.
[220] Toporkov, 15-16.

Between 1931 and 1936, Stanislavsky grew weary of the seemingly never-ending discussions around the table.[221] He turned to director's notes and his attention turned away from emotional recall towards "the fulfillment of tasks."[222] Toporkov described this new method as one of Stanislavsky's greatest achievements, saying:

> Does that mean he rejected the emotional side of our work? Not at all, he spoke of it every step of the way […] But he freed the actor and stopped him torturing himself by his concerns with emotion. He stopped him being in love with his own feelings and showed him the right, the natural way to uncover genuine human emotions, that are directed towards fulfilling his tasks, and which actively stimulate other actors.[223]

This new development in his teachings fit alongside the Soviet ideology better (as can be seen in the official Soviet acceptance of the System in 1938) than what was first developed by Stanislavsky after the 1905 European tour.

The actors who returned to Russia came back with new American contacts, and many returned to Russia rejuvenated by the shelter America provided them during their absence from Russian hardships. Those who remained or left Russia for the land of opportunity greatly contributed to the modernization and acting techniques of American theatre. If Stanislavsky returned to the Soviet Union in order to impact the changing theatrical scene, he was successful in doing so, leaving a lasting legacy behind him in Russia.

While he continued to work with new methods, at times very confusing to those who taught or researched his theories, Stanislavsky never disregarded any of his innovations; its basic principles—Relaxation, Concentration, Naïveté, Imagination, Affective Memory, Communication, Rhythm, Action, Script, and Character Analysis,

[221] Gordon, 14.
[222] Toporkov, 27.
[223] Ibid., 27.

Given Circumstances, Sense of Truth, "Magic If," Tempo-Rhythms, and Physical Actions all coincided to make up foundations of the System. Gordon best described the morphing nature of the System by likening it to an electrical circuit containing light bulbs: "any one – or line of lights – could be charged with a higher or lower intensity."[224]

The continual development of his system between 1931 and 1936 is interesting in that after his heart attack in 1928, he continued the rest of his life as a "semi-invalid." Whatever work he did during the last ten years of his life was done against the advice of his physicians.[225] (An autopsy later revealed that Stanislavsky had lived during those ten years with an enlarged heart, emphysema, and aneurisms.) The creative genius Stanislavsky died August 7, 1938. He was buried three days later next to Chekhov.[226]

After the 1923 and 1924 tours in America, the MAT did not tour and remained in the Soviet Union until 1937.[227] In 1937, Soviet authorities gave the theatre permission to perform in Paris, perhaps to demonstrate the achievements of socialism; but audiences, including émigrés from Russia, were dissatisfied by the performances, feeling that they did not live up to the old MAT productions.[228]

Conclusion

The 1923 and 1924 tours influenced how Russians felt toward their Moscow Arts Theatre. Many officials in culture viewed the theatre as "bourgeois" and urged them not to return. The decision to return, or emigrate, was difficult given the political turmoil and hostility toward the troupe, but that decision would forever change Russia's cultural

[224] Gordon,14.
[225] Benedetti, *Letters*, 329.
[226] Senelick, *Stanislavsky: A Life in Letters*, 618.
[227] Slonim, 318-319.
[228] Ibid., 318-319.

landscape. While Russia lost some of the MAT's most legendary actors, it held on to Stanislavsky. Had he not returned, his System would not have been the example for Socialist Realism—which also affected the success of the MAT.

CHAPTER 6

IMPACT OF THE 1923 AND 1924 MOSCOW ART THEATRE TOURS ON AMERICAN CULTURE: 1920-1940

The impact of Stanislavsky's ideas on American theatre, made possible by the American tours and spread by his disciples who remained behind, has been extensively researched by American theatre historians. However, this is done without regard to the social and political history of the time; and fails to examine its impact, or lack thereof, on popular culture. When examining Stanislavsky's influence on American society, it is important to not only examine the significant impact on theatre techniques, but look at American culture more generally and examine if any impressions have been left there.

American Practices Before 1923

In order to examine changes in American acting techniques, a background to American theatre before 1923 must first be established. Like Russia's theatrical origin, American theatre practices were European in origin. Unlike Russia, acting theory in America centered on the debate over whether actors should feel the emotions they portray.

This conflict originated from two famous essays, Diderot's "Paradox of Acting" and Talma's "Reflections on Acting." Those in support of Diderot's argument argued an "external" school of acting, one in which the actor did not feel the emotion of the character they were playing. Meanwhile the supporters of Talma, a French Tragedian, felt as though the actor should feel those passions as if those emotions were their own.

Thus, prior to the arrival and dominance of the System in American acting, the actors of the United States were divided on one of the most basic concepts of acting.

Some writers have ignored any contribution to American acting theory prior to the MAT's U.S. tour. In fact, there were schools of acting set up in the United States as early as 1884. American acting schools prior to Stanislavsky's arrival contained a variety of courses taught by experts and presented a method to the actors.[229] James H. McTeague's *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875—1925* was written with such a purpose: to prove the existence of acting schools and theories in America prior to 1923. This work is extremely rare in that most books written by those in the theatre community in the last couple of decades focus solely on the development of theatre following the System's arrival and acceptance in the United States.

The man with the greatest impact to American theatre schools, according to McTeague, was Steele MacKaye. His contributions to America included the formation of formal acting training and the development of acting theory and method.
He was an American director, actor, and playwright, who as early as 1871 called for the creation of an acting school in America. In 1884, he created the Lyceum Theatre School.[230] MacKaye was similar to Stanislavsky in that he rejected the European method of actor education—the student's imitation of the master actor portraying how the scene was traditionally played. The method he taught relied on instinct, "emotional" memory, and movement.[231]

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[229] James H. McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875—1925* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), xi-x.
[230] Ibid., x.
[231] Ibid, 42.

However, up until the arrival of Stanislavsky's System, no method or system had provided actors with "such workable directions for accomplishing" tapping into their own feelings in order to fully portray a role.[232] With the domination of the System, the debate over emotion all but ceased and Talma's argument for emotion won out amongst American actors. This development satisfied the growing desire, starting in 1870 in America, and demand for "a new sense of reality by means of quiet, restrained acting" by American theatregoers.[233]

Stanislavsky System Based Schools

Had the MAT's American Tour not been so successful, Americans would not have been as receptive to those teaching Stanislavsky's methods. Moreover, the young American theatre was ready to accept fresh ideas, open to innovations, so the seeds of Stanislavsky's System went into fertile soil. Many of the First Studio graduates taught in the US and emphasized what they believed were Stanislavsky's most significant contributions, not what the director would have taught himself. Therefore, by the time many American actors learned some version of Stanislavsky's methods, they were either from second or third hand accounts, and, like a game of telephone, changes and mistakes in translation were made. In 1938, twenty-five acting Studios advertised in *Theatre Art Monthly*; eleven of the twenty-five claimed to be Stanislavsky based.[234] Included in the list fourteen years after the director was on American soil were the

[232] Christine Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage: Its Contribution to the Russian and American Theatre* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 311.

[233] Barnard Hewitt, *Theatre U.S.A.: 1668 to 1957* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959), 227.

[234] Gordon, xiii-xiv.

schools of Maria Ouspenskaya, Tamara Daykarhanova, Andrius Jilinsky, and Michael Chekhov.[235]

Even before the tour, MAT actors reached the US and were ready to propagate Russian art. Richard Boleslavsky was the first former MAT actor to make a living off Stanislavsky's ideas. Before the tour, Bolelavsky never identified himself as being Russian; although the actor relocated to Russia in his tweens, he identified himself as "a Goddamned, obstinate Pole."[236] He was born Boleslaw Ryszaard Srzednicki in 1889, and, after his family immigrated to Russia, Boleslavsky attempted to conceal his ethnic origins. Before the Civil War, Boleslavsky's wife Natasha was unaware of his Polish background.[237] In 1906, the actor auditioned and was accepted into the MAT, with Stanislavsky's stipulation that he must lose his "Odessa accent."[238] Boleslavsky was also selected by the MAT director and Sulerzhitsky to participate in the First Studio.[239]

Unlike Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, Boleslavsky was not politically neutral. He enlisted in the Imperial Army during World War I and, during the Civil War, directed two anti-Bolshevik films.[240] Boleslavsky fled Russia in 1920 before the MAT's American tours.[241] During this time, the Kachalov group, which was still touring Europe, invited him to perform with them.[242] He continued to work his way around Europe when

[235] Gordon, xiii-xiv.
[236] Sharon M. Carnicke, "Boleslavsky in America" in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 117.
[237] Gordon, 17.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Carnicke, 118.
[240] Gordon, 17.
[241] Carnicke, 118.
[242] Gordon, 18.

the group split and some of the actors returned to Moscow. Boleslavsky finally arrived in America in September 1922.[243]

Despite his defection, Boleslavsky maintained his connection to the MAT and Stanislavsky. He had received a letter from Stanislavsky with the invitation of joining the group on their American tour as an actor and an assistant.[244] Stanislavsky presumably felt that Boleslavsky's previous experiences with the American people would help the other actors and himself to adjust to their new climate.

While the MAT was still in the U.S.A., Boleslavsky started to spread and teach the methods and techniques used by the Russian director. Ten days after the arrival of the MAT (January 2, 1923), Morris Gest, with Stanislavsky's permission, arranged for Boleslavsky to deliver ten lectures about the System.[245] These expressed the method behind the Russian acting style, and were the first explanation of the System heard in the United States. The first lecture took place in the Princess Theatre on January 18, 1923. Among those in attendance were Rosilind Fuller (American actress), Helen Arthur (manager of the Neighborhood Playhouse), Sophie Treadwell (playwright), and Miriam Kimball Stockton.[246] In April of that same year, Boleslavsky published an article "Stanislavsky: The Man and His Methods," in the *Theatre Arts Magazine*.[247]

Miriam Stockton, who attended his lecture at the Princess Theatre, encouraged Boleslavsky to start a Stanislavsky based school in New York City. The formal papers for the creation of the American Laboratory Theatre were drafted on June 29, 1923.[248]

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[243] Gordon, 19.
[244] Carnicke, 119.
[245] Carnicke, 18; Gordon, 20
[246] Edwards, *The Stanislavsky Heritage,* 239-240; Gordon, 20.
[247] Richard Boleslavsky, "Stanislavsky: The Man and His Methods," *Theatre Arts Magazine*, April 1923.
[248] Gordon, 21.

The acting school opened later that fall with five hundred dollars donated by Mrs. Stockton.[249] The actors who were to attend the school would receive the first, but muddled, training in Stanislavsky's methods in America. Among the earliest actors to attend the Lab were Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, and Harold Culrman.[250] These individuals involved with American theatre would become the second generation of Stanislavsky's followers.

Tuition at the Laboratory Theatre cost ten dollars a week and included classes in Technique of Acting, Plastique and Mimodrama, Ballet, Dalcroze *Eurhythmics*, Fencing, Drawing, The Spoken Word, Diction, Voice Production, The Art of Acting, and a two-hour lecture by Boleslavsky.[251] In his lecture, Boleslavsky stressed the importance of Stage Action over that of Emotional Memory.[252] By the fall of 1925, an article published in *Theatre Arts Monthly* raved about the school, saying that the students "have already caught something of the lux and continuity of Russian ensemble playing."[253]

The Lab would continue for a total of seven years (1923-1930). Although actors in America were excited to learn the secrets of the MAT, the reception to the lessons learned at the American Laboratory Theatre was mixed. In a society as individualistic as the United States, the collective ideas of Stanislavsky were difficult for many American's to accept. Boleslavsky, complaining to Stockton stated that, "it would be impossible to impose any foreign ideal upon American soil."[254] In addition Boleslavsky's poor English—his third language—and mistranslations, along with the cultural

[249] Ibid., 144-145.
[250] Edwards, 240.
[251] Gordon, 27.
[252] Ibid., 28.
[253] Edwards, 241.
[254] Carnicke, 121.

background of his students influenced their understanding, which transformed and muddied what they were taught.

In 1929, Boleslavsky left for the west coast.[255] Boleslavsky directed in Hollywood—one of his films even featured Clark Gable—until his death on January 17, 1937.[256] While in Hollywood, he wrote a book, *Acting, the First Six Lessons,* published in 1933, which focused on concentration, emotion memory, dramatic action, characterization, observation, and rhythm. After Boleslavsky's departure, the Lab continued on until 1930 under the direction of Maria Germanova, an ex-MAT performer who separated from the Kachlov group to remain in Europe, and later move to the US.[257]

While Boleslavsky lectured and wrote articles for magazines, former MAT actor Maria Oupenskaya taught classes at the Lab. She taught the Lab students the importance of concentration, Affective Memory, and Action.[258] During her career, she taught over fifteen-hundred students, and Gordon, a Professor of Theatre, credits Ouspenskaya with bringing "the 'Russian manner' of acting into the New World" more than any of the other former MAT teachers.[259]

Oupenskaya joined the MAT in 1911 and participated in the American tours. Along with other MAT actors, Oupenskaya remained in the United States. Many reasons for her defection were cited, including alcoholism, depression, career opportunities, and conflict between her and other MAT performers.[260] In 1931,

[255] Gordon, 30.
[256] Ibid., 30.
[257] Edwards, 241.
[258] Gordon, 28.
[259] Ibid., 23.
[260] Gordon, 24.

Ouspenskaya opened her own school called Maria Oupenskaya's School of the Dramatic Arts a year after the closure of the Lab. In her teachings, she focused on emotional recall and control of the senses.

The center of entertainment shifted from New York to Hollywood, and with it many in the business relocated. Ouspenskaya followed suit and, in September 1939, moved her school to Los Angeles. Her teaching methods were not for everyone; Katherine Hepburn walked out of a class in 1940.[261] In 1943, Ouspenskaya closed her school to return to Broadway; not long after, she moved back to Hollywood and reopened her school under the name The American Repertory Theatre and Studio. Oupenskaya died in 1949 as the result of a fire believed to have been caused by the actress. Her excessive consumption of alcohol and nicotine caused the actress to fall asleep while smoking a cigarette in bed.[262]

Lyoff (Leo) and Barbara Bulgakov toured with the MAT in America. Leo joined the group after the Revolution at the request of Nemirovitch-Dantchenko. The Bulgakovs remained in New York and enjoyed long careers in American entertainment. Between 1926 and 1938, Leo directed twenty productions on Broadway. He cast his wife, a beautiful blonde, in many of his works. Leo became very upset in rehearsals for *The Seagull* when the actors began to use Method acting techniques. According to Phoebe Brand, when Leo saw the actors using Affective Memory he shouted, "Don't do that! Stanislavsky toss it away long time ago."[263]

[261] Ibid., 32.
[262] Ibid., 32-33.
[263] Ibid., 82-83.

The Bulgakovs opened their own acting school, The Bulgakov Studio of Theatre Art, in 1938 in New York City.[264] Unfortunately, the studio was not open for long. World War II and the draft drastically affected the number of students enrolled in the studio. Like a number of other ex-MAT artists, the Bulgakovs moved to L.A. and took their chances in Hollywood, where they appeared in five movies, including *Song of Russia*. The Bulgakovs returned to the East Coast and Broadway in 1945 and spent the rest of their careers there.

Ivan Lazareef, a MAT actor, decided to remain in America as well. He, along with his wife Maria Astrova, introduced Stanislavsky's System to Chicago. They opened the Chicago Art Theatre in 1926, but Lazareef died soon after in 1929. Following her husband's death, Astrova remarried and moved around Europe.[265]

Another Stanislavsky trained actress, Tamara Daykarhanova, also taught a generation of American actors the MAT style of acting. She arrived in America before the MAT's American tour, accompanied by Balieff's Chauve-Souris.[266] She began to instruct students in her apartment in 1931 and later taught at Oupenskaya's New York studio.[267]

These former MAT actors each approached Stanislavsky's fundamentals in a different way. For example, Daykarhanova differed from Oupenskaya in that her lessons were very physical. Daykarhanova's students would practice movement and balance, and used vocal techniques, such as shouting, to achieve relaxation, while Oupenskaya

[264] Edwards, 241.
[265] Gordon, 84.
[266] Edwards 241.
[267] Gordon 81; Edwards, 242.

required her students to exhibit quiet and respectful behavior indoors.[268] In 1935, Daykarhanova left her teaching position with Oupenskaya to open her own school, the School for the Stage.[269] She taught actors and remained in entertainment and film until 1969.[270]

Andrius Jilinsky and Vera Soloviova taught at Daykarhanova's School for the Stage from 1935 to 1940. Both trained at the First Studio and joined the MAT before 1914. In 1920 the couple left Russia and during that time they performed with Chauve-Souris in Paris and the Prague Group of ex-MAT performers. They came back to Moscow in 1923 to join Michael Chekhov's Second MAT, and when the actor defected in 1928, the couple joined him.

Jilinsky and Soloviova ended up educating American actors at Daykaranova's school and later opened their own educational establishment, Andrius Jilinsky's Actors Workshop. Mary Hunter Wolf, who had the opportunity to study under Jilinsky, recalled the classes taught by the First Studio trained actor in "Reminiscences of Andrius Jilinsky and His Teaching."[271] At the School for the Stage, Soloviova taught a class on character and Jilinsky taught introduction to acting classes and worked with young students. After working with the beginners for three months for two and a half hours a day, the young group began to improve drastically. Actors with more experience, including Wolf, began requesting his two hour classes after seeing the demonstration put on by the beginner class and their progress. Jilinsky's two hour class included practice in sharpening the five senses, relaxation, partner interaction, physical

[268] Gordon, 81-82.
[269] Edwards, 242.
[270] Gordon, 82.
[271] Mary Hunter Wolf, "Remininces of Andrius Jilinsky and His Teaching" in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 129.

movements based on verbal clues, and personal and peer critiques.[272] He taught his students that "If you want to create truth on the stage, you must be acquainted with your own truth, and the truth of your life. It is something that belongs not only to the tradition of acting, but to the moral content of the theatre."[273] Instead of a focus on Affective Memory, Jilinsky felt that if an actor concentrated fully, the emotions would come naturally.[274]

Michael Chekhov was another ex-MAT performer who contributed to American theatrical techniques. He left Russia in 1927 under the impression that the secret police were watching him.[275] After defecting, Chekhov wandered around Europe, gathering a following of ex-First Studio and MAT actors, which called themselves the Moscow Art Players. At the invitation of Sol Hurok, the troupe put on a four week presentation of "The First American Repertory Season of Modern Soviet Plays and Russian Classics" in New York.[276] While in New York, Chekhov gave a series of lectures with Daykarhanova's assistance in translating.[277] Beatrice Straight, who was present at Chekhov's lecture, invited the actor to teach theatre at Darington.[278]

Straight brought Chekhov to England to open the Chekhov Theatre Studio on October 5, 1936.[279] The Studio moved to Connecticut and then New York because of WWII. Chekhov believed in the importance of the imagination, and is largely

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[272] Wolf, 130-131.
[273] Andrius Jilinsky, *The Joy of Acting: A Primer for Actors* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), 10.
[274] Wolf, 132.
[275] Leach, 416.
[276] Deidre Hurst Du Prey, *Michael Chekhov in England and America* in *Wandering Stars*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 159.
[277] Ibid., 160.
[278] Ibid., 160.
[279] Ibid., 162.

remembered for, and associated with, his views on the creative conscious.[280] For example, according to Chekhov, if an actor imagined or visualized their surroundings they would be emotionally impacted by the experience.

Chekhov later left for the West Coast, playing in a number of movie roles, and continued to teach. Among those he taught in America were Marilyn Monroe, Yul Brynner, Gregory Peck, Jack Palance, and Anthony Quinn.[281] Chekov also wrote a book, *To the Actor*, with the help of Deirdre Hurst du Prey. Du Prey took shorthand notes of all Chekhov's lessons, later transcribed into over three thousand pages.[282] Stanislavsky told Chekhov that it was important for one to write one's discoveries concerning acting down and organize them for "it is your duty and the duty of everyone who loves the theatre and looks devotedly into the future."283

Although many of the schools did not last long or enjoy much success, the ex-MAT actors were able to impress the fundamentals of Stanislavsky's System onto the American theatre arts and the future teachers of theatre. Many of these teachers focused on methods that worked best for them or they thought would be most helpful to the students. In addition, the fundamentals they taught were early versions of Stanislavsky's method, while Stanislavsky continued experimenting with the methods of acting. The System was destined to be distorted because the fundamentals taught in the United States were learned from the MAT actors at different times in the System's development, because of translation and human error, and because of the different cultural backgrounds of the students.

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[280] Gordon, 99.
[281] Leach, 417.
[282] Du Prey, 158.
[283] Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: on the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper, 1953), 179.

Conclusion

The second generation System teachers, those ex-MAT and First Studio graduates, paved the way for the third generation teachers, which included the renowned American teachers Lee Strasberg (the Method) and Stella Adler. These teachers, whose interpretations of Stanislavsky's System were quite different, went on to teach Broadway and Hollywood titans. Strasberg personally mentored Marilyn Monroe; other Method actors include Paul Newman, James Dean, Rip Torn, Al Pacino, and Robert De Niro. Adler's most famous pupil was the legendary Marlon Brando. Once these third generation pupils began to infiltrate Hollywood, the face of movies was forever changed. While Hollywood is not a realistic representation of life, more times than not, the quality of acting greatly improved. Today, actors still use methods taught by the American giants to get into character.

In addition to future generations of students, the implications and the waves left behind by the MAT's American tour continued on much later than 1940. In the early 1950s, a group of American actors were blacklisted from Hollywood and accused of being communists. Some of the blacklisted artists had written letters or telegraphs of congratulations to the MAT on their 50th anniversary. This correspondence was noted in their list of un-American actions and provided "proof" of communist leanings.[284] Therefore, American culture has continued to feel the ripples resulting from Stanislavsky and his system, and the MAT and its actors.

[284] American Business Consultants, *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, (New York: Counterattack, 1950).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The end of the 19th century was a period of intensive creative activity. In search of new forms, many artists of the Silver Age in Russia produced achievements of world class. The new groups and trends represented a definite innovation, a real rupture with the past and traditions. No longer did the Russians simply follow Europe's lead; now they initiated new and exciting artistic experiments of their own. Russian culture found itself in the avant-garde of global "avant-garde"—among such achievements that became jewels in world culture were those of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, the introduction of Russian Ballet in famous Diaghilev's Russian seasons in Paris, and works of Russian painters Kandinsky, Chagall and Malevich. Among these cultural innovations was Stanislavsky's theatrical system of acting.

Stanislavsky was dissatisfied with the conventional performing techniques actors used in theatre. He felt there must be a better way of acting than to replicate the emotions/actions traditionally associated with a particular character by a teacher or master thespian. With this in mind, in 1897 he set out to create, with Nemirovitch-Danchenko, a theatre that would be an experimental ground for his new System of acting and educational both for the actor and the public—the MAT. While there were other acting schools and even methods in 1906, the System of acting Stanislavsky created was the most effective and successful acting tool to date. Later it was adopted by the Socialist Realism style and the method became the standard taught to generations of Soviet theatre practitioners.

The MAT's traveling to Europe in 1906 and America in 1923-24, which was primarily caused by warfare and turmoil within Russia, finally resulted in the propagation of the System and gaining world acclaim. Beside that, touring America, and other capitalist countries, allowed MAT to stay afloat while many theaters failed in revolutionary Russia. The cities of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, Pittsburg, New Haven, Hartford, Newark, Cleveland, and Detroit all played host to the Russian theatre troupe during their first (January 2, 1923 – June 7, 1923) and second (November 23, 1923 – May 24, 1924) tours. Despite the fact that the plays put on by the MAT were performed exclusively in the Russian language, American audiences loved, laughed, and cried, moved by the innovative style and exceptionally emotional acting of MAT performers. The tours changed American people's views on Russians – they now understood it was possible to have artistic creativity in Bolshevik society. Moreover, American theatre actors and the public recognized that the Russians had reached a level of perfection in the arts, and the MAT's success in America allowed for the proliferation of the System in the New World. American actors desired to learn the advanced acting methods used by the Russians, and took classes from Stanislavsky's students who remained in the United States. Within a generation under System education, American actors established themselves among the world's elite.

Both Americans and Russians understood the important role of theatre in society (especially before the domination of cinema): it has the ability to inspire and alter the mood of its audiences. Both cultures have used theatre as propaganda, purely as art, and as education. It is remarkable that in the same years another breakthrough in

visual/performing arts was achieved by Russian artists with their invention of the montage technique, which allowed them to powerfully manipulate the consciousness of the audience. Through theatre, movies, and later, television, the arts in general have been moved forward by Stanislavsky and his descendants. The result was that the Stanislavsky system of acting became a principal, and one of the most effective techniques, used by actors all over the world to reach a new level of perfection.

In spite of the fact that the MAT's 1923 and 1924 tours to America played such a pivotal role in both Russian and American culture, and in the world recognition of a new system of acting, until today only theatrical specialists studied their role purely from the professional point of view. Literature on the subject lacked historical analysis of many implications this cultural exchange had for American theatre, for the preservation of the MAT and development of the System and, in general, for world culture. Generations of historians either failed to mention the MAT's American tours, or relegated it to only a few paragraphs. I studied the tours within several contexts: of general theatre culture of the period, and specifically American and Russian cultures; of the severing ideological and political climate inside the USSR at the beginning of the 1920s as surveillance and cultural pressures increased; of international tensions between the young Bolsheviks' regime and the US; and of the System's internal evolution from the end of the 19th century through the 1930s. Through this thesis, the first historical study of the important moment in theatre evolution, I aim to fill this gap in historical knowledge.

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