

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
PAUL FRYER AND ANASTASIA TOROS

VIKTOR SIMOV
STANISLAVSKY'S DESIGNER



VIKTOR SIMOV

Viktor Simov: Stanislavsky's Designer is the first English-language biography of Konstantin Stanislavsky's principal scenic designer at the Moscow Art Theatre from the company's formation in 1898. His groundbreaking work included the designs for the premieres of Anton Chekhov's major stage plays, and his approach to theater design still influences contemporary scenography.

Translated from the original Russian text written by author, editor and literary critic Yuri Ivanovich Nekhoroshev, the book provides a revealing insight into the staging and technical practices of one of the world's most influential theater companies. Supported by 60 illustrations representing the full range of Simov's designs, this volume provides a historical account of Simov's career and a vivid description and critical assessment of his work. The book traces the artist's development from his early years as a painter to his later experiments in early silent film design, including his work for the classic Russian science-fiction film *Aelita, Queen of Mars* (1924).

Written for theater scholars and students of Scenic Design and Drama courses, *Viktor Simov* re-establishes Simov as one of the most influential theater designers of the 20th century.

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VIKTOR SIMOV

Stanislavsky's Designer

*A new edition of the original book by
Yuri Ivanovich Nekhoroshev*

*Translated and Edited by Paul Fryer and
Anastasia Toros*

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**To the memory of Jean Benedetti and Richard Hornby,
and dedicated to all lovers of the performing arts, past,
present and yet to come.**



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EDITOR'S NOTE

As with so many projects, this book was provoked by a question: who was Viktor Simov? – or perhaps, more precisely, who was responsible for designing Stanislavsky's productions that were often so familiar to us from the production photographs that have been published in so many books.

Having spent a considerable amount of time in close contact with more than 200 photographic images of Moscow Art Theatre productions held in the Stanislavski Archive at Rose Bruford College in the UK, where I was formerly Associate Director of Research and Director of The Stanislavski Centre, I had frequently seen examples of some of Simov's most important theater designs, but had never investigated the artist who had created them.

The answer to our question came in the form of a Russian-language book that had never been published in the West, and which I first discovered amongst the books in the research library of the late Professor Jean Benedetti. Yuri Ivanovich Nekhoroshev's book, *Dekorator Khudozhestvennogo teatra Viktor Andreevich Simov* (literally translated as, *Decorator of the Art Theater Viktor Andreevich Simov*), was originally published by Sovetski Khudozhnik (Soviet Artist), the official publishing house of the Artists Union of the USSR, in 1984.

Throughout his text, Nekhoroshev adopted a sometimes scholarly and sometimes journalistic approach to his writing, including an inconsistent and sometimes incomplete attitude toward identifying sources and attributing them in a way that has subsequently become standard. Often quite detailed references were included, sometimes very abbreviated details, and, occasionally no information at all. It was also evident that the vast majority of sources that he quoted have been out of print and unavailable for many years and may never have been available in any published version outside of Russia, or may occasionally have been republished in different versions in different translations and at later dates.

In an effort to be as “complete” as possible and as faithful to the author’s original research and his text, in this new English-language edition, we decided to retain all of Nekhoroshev’s original references in parentheses in the body of the text. We have attempted to be as accurate as possible at the level of bibliographic detail, although sometimes this has not been possible.

Although often writing vividly and descriptively, Nekhoroshev’s use of language can sometimes seem over-formal and stilted to a modern reader. Whilst recognizing this, we have attempted to retain his original “voice” while making his prose as accessible as possible for contemporary consumption.

One of the most interesting and valuable aspects of Nekhoroshev’s book is his inclusion of a final lengthy section, which he calls “V.A. Simov – Fragments from Memories”, material written by the designer himself, probably in preparation for his complete autobiography. Although the notes he included are sometimes frustratingly incomplete, they provide a vivid picture of the man himself, and, crucially, they are in his own words. His observations on the theatrical design practices of his time are fascinating, and the insight that he provides into his relationship with Stanislavsky, Chekhov and some of the many artists with whom he worked in the scenic studios of the Moscow Art Theatre are an invaluable addition to our understanding of this remarkable era.

Nekhoroshev provided the following note on his use of Simov’s original material:

There are many discrepancies in Simov’s memoirs, which were partially published in newspapers and magazines. Therefore, this publication is based on the text printed in the collection *About Stanislavsky*, compiled and edited by the historian of the Moscow Art Theatre, L.Y. Gurevich [L. Gurevich, *O Stanislavskom*. Moscow, Vserossiiskoe Teatral’noe Obshchestvo, 1948]. The text is supplemented with excerpts taken from a typewritten copy of Simov’s manuscript, which is kept in the Museum of the Moscow Art Theatre.

(Simov’s archive 5132/3)

The original Russian edition of Nekhoroshev’s book contained 180 illustrations, mostly reproduced in small, half or quarter page versions, and often in less than ideal quality. In this new edition, we have restricted ourselves to some 60 images, representative of the range of Simov’s design work, which we have sourced in the best possible resolution from the collections of The Stanislavski Archive (Rose Bruford College, UK) and the Moscow Art Theatre Museum.

Paul Fryer, July 2019

FOREWORD

Viktor Simov was born on 2 April 1858 in Moscow and died in the same city on 21 August 1935. He was a scenographer who had graduated from the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in 1882 and was honored as an Arts Worker in 1932. He was interested in graphic design, historical painting and architectural planning. Among his colleagues and friends were Isaac Levitan, Nikolai Kasatkin and Nikolai Chekhov [brother of playwright Anton]. In 1885 Levitan invited Simov to work with the Mamontov Private Opera, carrying out decorations and studying the profession of scenographer.

In 1897 he met Konstantin Stanislavsky, who invited him to work on Gerhart Hauptmann's 1896 play, *The Sunken Bell* for the Society of Art and Literature. In the following year this production was moved to the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre during its first season. From 1 May 1898 Simov became the Moscow Art Theatre's scenographer. There he designed 49 productions, starting with Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*. Having been educated as a professional painter, it took some time for Simov to develop a sense of color and form in the theater. However, he learned a great deal from "The Wanderers" (*Peredvizhniki*) and especially from Vasily Perov, head of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, and founder of "The Wanderers". Simov's innate sense of life truth together with his gift for observation, his natural good taste and his feeling for dramatic verisimilitude were developed in this way, allowing him to follow Stanislavsky's concepts and interpret them precisely. Simov claimed that in the Moscow Art Theatre the scenographer had almost the same amount of control as the director, because his work consisted not only of creating an external image, but also of unfolding the director's plans convincingly. In summing up Simov's creative method, Markov said: "He was the first designer-director."

Simov's historical role in theatrical life can be identified by two circumstances: firstly, meeting Stanislavsky himself and secondly, the fact that they coincidentally had identical artistic goals. Simov wrote that he avidly absorbed everything that Stanislavsky said. Moreover, he was able to visualize his ideas and create the artistic work which actively formed the aesthetic of the first period of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Although familiar with all aspects of life, Simov went on expeditions to gather material for almost every single production, filling countless albums with sketches of life, nature, and different characters. For instance, in preparation for *The Snow Maiden* he visited the Vologda region, for *The Power of Darkness*, the Tula district and for *Julius Caesar*, Rome. He started work on each production firstly from sketching life itself, then by watching the casting process, and then “transforming” the two into the language of scenic forms. The term “space” was not used at that time, but “the planning” was a term used in making decisions concerning space.

Simov-Stanislavsky's innovations in the use of space had a huge impact on the development of Russian theater and beyond. Starting with Hauptmann's



FIGURE 0.01 Viktor Simov.

Source: Stanislavski Centre Archive, Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.

The Sunken Bell and Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*, they both demolished the long-held characteristics of that "smooth and dirty theatrical world", which Stanislavsky abhorred. New theatrical platforms appeared, together with the ability to build *mise-en-scenes* on different levels. Verticality became one of the most important coordinates of spatial decision in the theater of the 20th century. The Moscow Art Theatre started to make use of the whole depth of the stage, to divide it into different plans, which gave the opportunity to show the content of a play in completely new ways.

Already in *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich* they experimented with diagonal composition (for instance in the scene "On the River Yauza"). The spatial innovations in early productions were not greatly commented on by the critics, as they were hidden beneath the wealth of decorative details, which also helped the actors in the performance of their roles. The connection between the truth of the actor's existence on stage and the truth of historical details, shown in the materials and the props with which the actors were surrounded, became one of the main principles of the Moscow Art Theatre. Everything that had been placed on stage had its own life: the character of a detail, the biography of the furniture and accessories – in presenting these, Simov was unequalled. The props complemented not only the actors, but also the sound and lighting.

The use of light in Simov's productions was as innovative as the planning. He used realistic lighting – the window, the table lamp, the slightly opened doors of an oven and so on. For him every aspect of the scenographic composition contributed to the creation of the mood. Precision and theatrical expressiveness could be achieved by considering the season of the year, the state of the weather, the time of day, the interior furnishings, the costume details. This was the main innovation of the Moscow Art Theatre, and can be seen in the scenographic functions of the cycle of Chekhov productions between 1898 and 1904.

Lifelike domestic interiors and the subordination of the actor's existence on stage to achieving the director's goals – these specifics of Simov's scenography can be seen in his later productions for the Moscow Art Theatre, such as *Armoured Train 14-69* in 1927 and *Dead Souls* in 1932. Although his soul was truly in scenography, which was appreciated not only in the Moscow Art Theatre, at the end of his life Simov regretted not having been a true painter of Fine Art. His paintings did not have the same strength as his theatrical designs. Yakov Gremislavski wrote that Simov's commitment to "the old methods of decorative painting", sometimes divided his pictures into meaningless parts. Even in Chekhov's productions, "almost all his paintings were redone several times".

Simov's innovative work influenced the principles that informed the work of artists to come. For instance his stage work was equally influential in the uniting of stage and auditorium in *Antigone*, the natural elements in *The Power of Darkness* and the technical achievements of stage presentation, such as the use of mirrors in other productions.

When Stanislavsky felt the need for a new style of painting, he turned to the “Miriskusniki”, who had been introduced by Simov to the secrets of theatrical techniques. In 1912, Simov left the Moscow Art Theatre to work with Marjanov in the Svobodny Theatre, and then in the Opera Studio organized by Stanislavsky and later in the cinema, where he designed *Aelita* in 1924 and *The Stationmaster* in 1925. He took part in the creation of an experimental artistic laboratory for the Moscow Art Theatre during the 1925–1926 season, and he developed the idea of a stage without the overhead grid controlling the lighting and scenery.

His last work for the Moscow Art Theatre was for a new production of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1935, which unfortunately was left incomplete at the time of his death.

A. Mikhailova

Extracted from *The Moscow Art Theatre: One Hundred Years* (Moscow, 1998), and published by kind permission of the editor, Anatoly Smeliansky.

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Alexander Nekhoroshev (for permission to use his father's original text, and for providing a short note on his father's life and work); Anatoly Smeliansky (for permission to use the biographical note on Simov, which originally appeared in his edition of *The Moscow Art Theatre: One Hundred Years*); Marfa Bubnova, Moscow Art Theatre Museum (for locating images from the Museum collection for use in this book); Frank Trew, librarian at Rose Bruford College, UK (for assisting us with the use of images from The Stanislavski Archive); Anna Shulgat (for her endless advice and support and help negotiating image rights for the book); Nigel Hook (for advice on the manipulation and placement of images for the book). Jan Knight (for advice and help with translation); Lucia Accorsi at Routledge, Taylor and Francis (for her constant advice and support for this project).



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INTRODUCTION

Yuri Ivanovich Nekhoroshev: The Last Literary Critic of the Era of Social Realism

Yuri Ivanovich Nekhoroshev was born on 14 April 1925 in Penza, a regional center 800 kilometers south-east of Moscow. The name “Nekhoroshev” is famous in the annals of Russian military history. His grandfather Dementy fought against the Turks in Bulgaria in 1877, his father Ivan fought the Japanese in 1904, the Germans in 1914 and the Russians in the Civil War in 1920. Yuri himself was concussed at the front during the Second World War in 1942.

In fact, he was born dead, but was revived by an eminent local doctor who was interested in scientific experiments. Although on many occasions during his life he was on the brink of death due to congenital heart disease, he survived until a few months before his 92nd birthday, dying peacefully in his sleep.

In 1935 Ivan Nekhoroshev, hero of the Civil War, was expelled from the Party. This threatened the lives of his whole family, and Yuri learnt the meaning of hunger. After his father’s lengthy disappearance in search of earnings, Yuri took to stealing in order to support his mother. Luckily, he never got caught, but most of his friends ended up serving prison sentences.

His early talent for drawing and the natural interest in the fine arts led Yuri to The Penza Art College after the War, from which he graduated with the degree of Stage Designer. The Director of the college and his personal tutor was Ivan Goryushkin-Sorokopudov, a prominent representative of Russian realistic art, who was said to have been a favorite pupil of the genius Ilya Repin.

In 1948, Yuri entered the Faculty of Theatre Studies at The Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS). His tutor was Pavel Markov who had been the literary director of the Moscow Art Theatre since 1924, when at the helm had stood the great Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Natalia

2 Introduction

Krymova, later a theater critic and historian of the Moscow Art Theatre, and Anatoly Efros, later one of the most important Soviet theater directors of the second half of the 20th century also attending the same course as Yuri.

Nadezhda Finogenova was another student who was later renowned as a specialist in the field of World Circus and Popular Arts and was my future mother. I was born soon after she and Yuri had completed their studies at GITIS in 1953.

Over the next few years, Yuri Nekhoroshev was involved in various literary enterprises. He worked as editor for a firm of book publishers, wrote for a monthly magazine and was the Art Correspondent for “Izvestia”, where Aleksei Adjubey, the son-in-law of the then leader of the country, Nikita Khrushchev, was the editor-in-chief.

The heads of the specialist magazines “Theatre” and “Artist” recognized his talent as a perceptive critic and fought for his services. Eventually Yuri forsook the theater and threw himself passionately into the world of fine art. In 1965, after working for some time as deputy editor-in-chief of “Artist”, he was appointed as editor-in-chief of the magazine “Creativity” – the organ of the Union of Artists of the USSR – where he worked for twenty years.

Such a long period in a key position is evidence of Yuri Nekhoroshev’s skill in keeping a fine balance between the Communist Party’s dictates and the eternally opposed ideas of the community of artists from every field. He never bowed to blind authority that regarded social realism as the most important direction for art in the USSR.

As far as he could, he defended the artist’s right to an independent vision of the world as well as the critic’s right to assess artistic phenomena independently, despite the totalitarian conditions prevailing at the time. He was not always successful however, and in order to survive in his profession, he had to make compromises. Throughout this period in his life he was under constant suspicion of being “Unreliable” by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who ruled the cultural processes in the USSR and frequently imposed sanctions on him. I remember from my childhood, that my father was constantly anticipating dismissal, but it was not until he released an article highly critical of the pro-Party painter Alexander Shilov, that he compulsorily retired at the age of 60.

This setback, however, did not unduly depress him. Although he had lost his formal position, his status as an art authority was undiminished. He continued to be invited to various congresses, meetings, biennials and other exhibitions, and his acute critical response to hundreds of diverse works was admired by many of his generation. It seemed that the lack of the need to go to work regularly only fueled his professional activity and he was constantly on the move. The number of articles he wrote during this period is countless. He then published several major volumes with sketches of the works of famous artists.

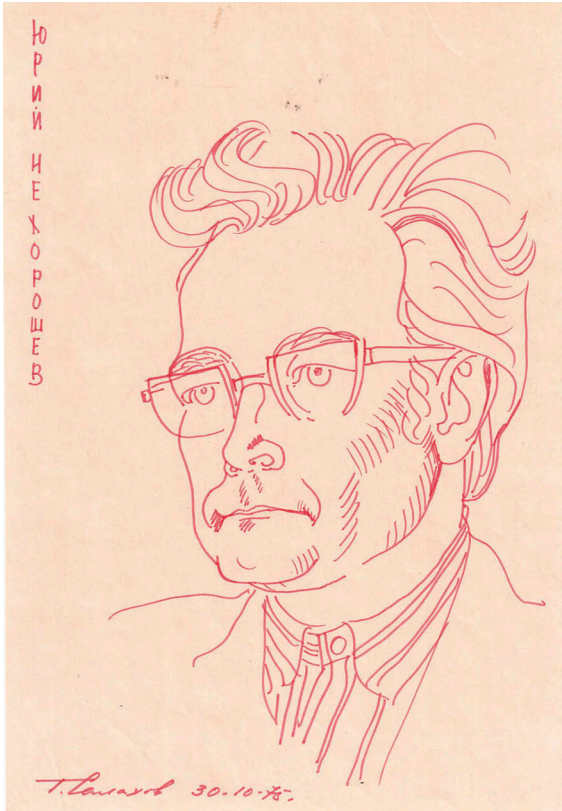


FIGURE 0.1 Portrait of Yuri Nekhoroshev by Tair Salakhov.

Source: from the private collection of Alexander Nekhoroshev.

Surprisingly, it was during this period that his talent received formal recognition. In 1999 the President of Russia awarded him the title of “Honored Artist”, and The Academy of Arts elected him “Honorary Academician”.

Yuri Nekhoroshev was writing books until the day he died. He wrote using pen and ink, disdaining the use of a computer.

The book *Dekorator Khudozhestvennogo teatra Viktor Andreevich Simov*, devoted to the first years of the work of the Moscow Art Theatre, was published in 1984. There are two reasons for his return to this theme, which had been the basis of his thesis in 1953 at GITIS. Firstly there was the natural desire to publish an old work from the point of view of a mature author; more importantly perhaps, work on the book allowed him, at least for a while, the chance to immerse himself in a period where there was no social realism and there were no curators from the Central Committee of the Communist

4 Introduction

Party of the Soviet Union. As one might say these days, it was an escape into virtual reality, but one in which the scientific value has not been lost.

I am grateful for the offer to publish Yuri Nekhoroshev's book in English. I hope that it will provide better understanding of the creative nature of the founders of modern Russian theater, whose ideas and achievements are of undoubted interest to new generations of admirers of theater art worldwide.

**Alexander Nekhoroshev,
Moscow, August 2017**

1

ON THE EVE OF THE CENTURY

On the evening of Wednesday 14 October 1898 on Karetny Rad, in the center of Moscow, theater-goers were hurrying home from various entertainments. The doors of The Hermitage swung to and fro as people came and went. During the summer there had been a program of light entertainment, but now in late autumn, the Moscow Art Theatre had just started its first season.¹ Rumors concerning this event had abounded for some time.

One of Moscow's most prominent businessmen, Mr. Alekseev,² also had aspirations to become a theatrical entrepreneur. He founded an artistic theater in Moscow. And other businessmen realized how lucky they were to have such a colleague. Newspapers across the country were full of enthusiasm for his First Guild Theatre.

The atmosphere! The lavish ambience! The synchronicity!

Even the famously acerbic theatrical reviewer V. Doroshevich³ claimed that it was not only artistic, but *super First Guild artistic!*

The press ridiculed the organizers, who seemed to treat the theater as a temple within which the actors were given priestly status. And in fact, it is strange that instead of vaudevilles and popular melodramas, which would have been financially successful, the organizers chose to produce Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy's historical drama *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*.⁴

The play is long and boring. Compared to *The Seagull* by the humorist Chekhov, recently panned in St. Petersburg as not only bad, but absolutely atrocious, this is a non-starter. It's not a Seagull, it's a Dodo. The first performance by the Moscow Art Theatre finished at 2 a.m. But in the next morning's edition of *The Courier*, it was noted that the performance left too many impressions to give an immediate detailed response. However, the reviewer added that the season's opening was an unqualified success, stating

6 On the Eve of the Century

that *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich* was brilliantly staged in a way few other performances in Moscow have ever been.⁵

In subsequent articles and reviews, the democratic aspirations of the Moscow Art Theatre were noted. However, one critic stingingly remarked that the audience that night was hardly what might be considered representative of “The Moscow Public”. Apart from the several members of the Moscow elite in the stalls and boxes, the audience was mostly made up of many new faces. Much later, N.Y. Efros⁶ recalled that many people who came to that performance by the newly-formed Moscow Art Theatre, had been highly skeptical, searching for flaws, trying to find faults and getting satisfaction from finding them.

Little by little however, the bright rays of the performance, the hot artistic light pouring from the stage into the auditorium began to disperse the skeptical fog and negative criticism. Instead of skepticism came enlightenment. The chill of distrust gave way to the warmth of admiration. Five days later, the newly-formed theater company produced Gerhart Hauptmann’s *The Sunken Bell* (*Die versunkene Glocke*)⁷ and two nights after that, Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. This was followed by *The Seagull* on 17 December.⁸ The stylized image of the Seagull used in this production became an emblem for the company.

At the head of this young company were K.S. Stanislavsky, V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko and V.A. Simov. Stanislavsky was already by this time a well-known actor and director, whose dream was to revolutionize the traditional theater. V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko was a professional theatrical critic and playwright and an experienced drama teacher. The artist and scenographer, V.A. Simov was a representative of the progressive art movement known as “The Wanderers” (*Peredvizhniki*);⁹ he was in love with the history of Russia, her soul and her evocative landscape.



FIGURE 1.1 *The Seagull* (Chekhov), Act 1, 1898.

Source: Stanislavski Centre Archive, Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.

The founders of the Moscow Art Theatre, while protesting against conventional art, shared the dream of introducing drama to Russia's poorer classes, offering them an aesthetic experience, which would lift them from the darkness of their everyday lives. The company quickly established an audience including students, teachers, agricultural workers and doctors who gradually fell in love with the performances that reflected their own uncertain destinies. Ever-growing success and loud acclaim proved that a new theater had been born in Russia, one that opened up new possibilities for realistic artistic productions. In 1898 the work of the Moscow Art Theatre was only recognized by Russian audiences but, by 1906, its fame had spread internationally, due in no small part to the work of Viktor Simov, who for the first ten years was the company's only scenographer.

The failure of Chekhov's *The Seagull* on the stage of the Imperial Alexandrinsky Theatre was not an accident.¹⁰ New trends in art, new aesthetic programs fueled by new ideas were being born. Their appearance was due to the intensification of the whole of Russian life. At the end of the 19th century the proletarian liberation movement began to have an impact on imperialism and thus brought about a huge change in Russian politics and the arts. The literary works of L.N. Tolstoy, A.P. Chekhov, M. Gorky, A.I. Kuprin and I.A. Bunin that depicted all layers of society were highly successful, Critical realism, which represented the inner world of the individual and stripped bare the true face of high society, enriched literary genres. Writers paid much more attention to themes based on the moral bankruptcy of the nobility and the first works concerning the lives of the proletariat began to appear.

In the early 1890s D. Merezhkovsky¹¹ tried to establish symbolism as a means of counteracting and discrediting contemporary materialistic literature. He saw a literary renaissance in divine idealism and believed that only mystical content could freely show in full measure the extent of religious feeling in Russia. To demonstrate this Merezhkovsky offered symbolic images as a medium of expression. Brusov¹² however, found salvation not in mysticism but in the spiritual world of the poet. The appearance of new movements, such as social realism in the works of Gorky, were also a natural phenomenon of this era. On the basis of conflicting methods, new stylistic forms were developed, which were fundamentally opposite to each other in psychological content.

The year the Moscow Art Theatre opened also saw the first publication of the magazine "Mir Iskusstva" ("The World of Art"), which marked another stage in the development of Russian visual art.¹³ In the first issue Sergei Diaghilev wrote an article entitled "Complicated Questions", in which he sharply criticized the "tendentious" and "utilitarian" in contemporary art. At the same time he did not absolutely reject the social significance of the divine nature of the artist, whose destiny is to love only beauty. This sense of unique individualism was attractive to the symbolists who willingly submitted articles. The magazine drew together artists from different creative backgrounds, who were united by the desire to create

new ways of developing Russian painting, other than those promulgated by The Wanderers. This association, which had become an institution in the development of Russian national art, was undergoing a difficult time: the national ideals that it represented had outlived themselves and the “new” Wanderers took no account of the current social changes. Apart from internal disputes among its members, a number of talented artists who were trying to enrich art emotionally were leaving the association or taking part in exhibitions organized by “Mir Iskusstva” and, from 1903, in those also organized by the Union of Russian Artists.¹⁴

On these waves of turbulent change appeared the sail of a young theater company. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, auditioned actors and selected them carefully, not only judging them on their current skills, but also anticipating how each talent might be further developed. Their goal was the broad renewal of a stale repertoire. They were opposed to mannered acting, false pathos, verbose recitation, slovenly production and second-rate scenic design. They invited a “Wanderer”, Viktor Simov, to be their art director and scenographer. Why a Wanderer? Why develop an innovative program and then appoint a person representative of the established aesthetic system? To understand this paradox, we need to make a journey back in time.

It wasn't by chance that the Moscow Art Theatre was founded in Moscow. V.G. Belinsky¹⁵ noted that when it came to science, art and literature, Muscovites had more knowledge, space, taste, culture and education than even the most literate of St. Petersburgians. The spread of democratic culture was largely due to Moscow University and The Maly Theatre.¹⁶ After the monopoly of the imperial theaters was abolished,¹⁷ private theaters such as A.A. Brenko's Troupe, the Korsha Theatre and the Mamontov Opera, emerged in Moscow. In 1888 The Society of Art and Literature,¹⁸ an informal artistic club, was founded, which had an interest in drama and opera as well as other cultural areas. Apart from The Tretyakov Gallery, lovers of the visual arts could also visit the permanent exhibitions organized by the Society of Art Lovers, founded in 1881, and the exhibitions held by students of The Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture,¹⁹ which is where the creative life of the future scenographer of the Moscow Art Theatre began.

Viktor Simov was born on 14 April 1858. His father was a surveyor but after his father died when he was four-years old, he was brought up by his mother in difficult financial circumstances; she taught French, gave music lessons and took in lodgers to help make ends meet. Viktor's talent for painting emerged very early. A drawing he made while he was studying at high school was awarded a medal and the art teacher drew his mother's attention to her son's ability. After reaching his senior year, Simov decided to enter The Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, or the Moscow Academy, as it was generally known.

The Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (MSPSA) originated in a small group of enthusiasts whose guiding spirit was E.I. Makovsky.²⁰