

Berlin, 27th of March 2009

Dear friends and colleagues,

I decided to write a very personal letter, because the matter concerned really is dear to my heart. I'd like to invite you to participate in an international action that is about theatre. Let me shortly describe my idea!

In the beginning of next year, theatre people all around the world will mark Anton Chekhov's 150th birthday anniversary. Chekhov himself used to laugh at celebrations and jubilees of all kind. So do I. Chekhov means a lot to me, but I just can't stand it when banalities are said about him. Therefore, I have no intention to participate in any official celebration. I have a different suggestion to make: Let us all join in another kind of action – an action of art, which, in my understanding, will be performed not for the sake of someone or of ourselves, but for its own sake, for the sake of its soul. I expect actors and directors from all over the world to take part in it. I don't know how many will participate - maybe 15-20, maybe one thousand. No matter what the number will be in the end: It is going to be an action for theatre friends in the whole world. At the heart of the matter lies the idea that all creative souls are bound together in just one – the idea of Chekhov's "world soul".

Chekhov's characters are dear to all who played them if only once. They leave deep traces in our creative life, and in many respects they define our positions as theatre artists. One of them is probably even dearer and closer to us than all the rest, because it is as metaphysical as our actor's destiny. That character is Nina Zarechnaya. The image of Nina is most meaningful to actresses and actors, directors, writers – to all people, actually, who consider themselves as artists. With more precision than anyone else, Nina expresses what art, as a profession, is all about: *"No matter whether we play on a stage or write - the main thing is not glory, is not to shine out, is not that which I dreamed of, but the capacity to suffer. You must be able to bear your cross and believe. I believe, and that way, it doesn't hurt so much, and when I think of my calling I am not afraid of life."*

Remember how often these words helped us to hold on in difficult moments of doubts and failures, how they supported our belief in The Theatre and in our own capacities, how they protected us against vulgarity and banality, how they wouldn't let us compromise when our dreams were concerned.

Do you remember the dialogue between Nina and Treplev in the last scene?

NINA. (...) To go by train early in the morning to Yelets, traveling third class, along with some muzhiks... And in Yelets, those educated merchants will make their advances. It's a hard life!

TREPLEV. Why would you go to Yelets?

NINA. I signed up there for the whole winter season. It's time for me to go.

I found out whereabouts in Russia this small provincial town is located. I found out that the theatre to which Nina went for a whole winter season still exists, and that they still play performances there. So I got the idea to take a train like Nina did, to go to that theatre and to celebrate Anton Chekhov's birthday with the local actors. It will be a special occasion – an international festival on the smallest scale that no-one will know about. At the moment, I'm working on the program, and I shall inform you about it, of course.

The main point in it is, however, this: I suggest to put up - in this very town, near this very theatre - a sculpture to "The Actress". Let there be written on it: "To the actress Nina Zarechnaya". It will be the first-ever monument to an actress who never lived. Let there be at least one such monument in the whole world. A monument not for outstanding merits, leading roles, Oscars and the state prizes, but one to The Actress as such, a monument to our profession. In real life, there never was an actress called Nina Zarechnaya, but in the reality of theatre life, there was, and this is her monument. I like the idea that it will stand not in Moscow in front of the Moscow Art Theatre, not in Berlin in front of the Berliner Ensemble, not in Paris in front of the Comédie Française, but in an unknown place, in some tiny little town which cannot be found on a map of the world, in front of a theatre very few people have heard about, far away from Broadway and the Champs Elysées.

Let me make it clear straightaway that this is not a commercial project, and that I won't try to raise money from banks or producers. I'm asking actors, actresses, directors and everyone else from the planet of Theatre to contribute and thus be part of the action. Let people from all over the world each give as much as he or she will see fit, from his or her soul, to make possible such a monument in honour of The Actress. That will be an action in its own right which, I hope, will draw us a little closer together, which will make us, if only for a minute, recollect our youth and our dreams, and which will strengthen our belief in what we do and what we call Theatre.

That's all. I wish you success in your creative work!
Yours, sincerely,

your colleague, your teacher, your friend
Prof. Dr. Jurij Alschitz

Who likes to participate, please transfer your contribution to

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IBAN: DE89100500000230032206
BIC: BELADEVXXX, Berliner Sparkasse
With the remark: **NINA-PROJEKT**

Or PayPal: akt.zent@berlin.de

And send your **Name, address, telephone und e-mail adresse to: akt.zent@berlin.de**

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