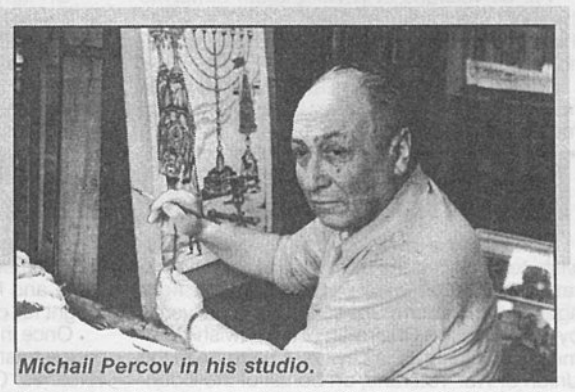
AN ARTIST WITH THE CAPITAL LETTER



Michail Percov in his studio.

On May 26 Michail Percov, a prominent theater artist and a wonderful person, celebrated his 80th anniversary. For the past five decades his name constantly appeared on theater posters. When M. Percov came to theater in the first post-war year, he worked with B. Dauguvietis, the coryphaeus of the Lithuanian state dramatic theater of that time. Such famous stage directors as R. Juknevičius, J. Rudzinskas, S. Nosevičiūte, K. Kymantaitė, V. Jurkunas invited him as a stage designer for their plays. M. Percov dedicated many of his creative years to the State Russian theater where he fruitfully co-operated with L. Lurje, V. Lanskis and many other stage directors.

When in 1960s the Lithuanian theater was reinforced with young talents - A. Ragauskaite, N. Ogaj, J. Jurašas, V. Čibiras - they brought in new ideas about stage action. M. Percov found himself on the wave of changes in the theater-decorative art. He came up with his own ideas of the usage of stage space and became one of the greatest stage designers in Lithuania.

This is what **Raimonda Vitinaitė - Širvinskienė** writes about M. Percov's creative work:

A sketch of scenery to the play "The wise men of Chelm" by M. Gershenzon.

A plastic composition to W.Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet".

Scenery to the play "Dead Souls" by N. Gogol.

"M. Percov belongs to the glorious generation of such theater artists as J. Taujanskaitė, R. Songailaitė, I. Jankus, F. Navickas, J. Čeičyte, J. Surkevičius, V. Palaima. He masterfully applied his scenery to different genres, styles and measurements of the stage: in Šiauliai dramatic, State dramatic, State Russian dramatic, Kaunas music, State youth, State Opera and Ballet house and even in the Puppet theater.

M. Percov experienced almost all tragic turning points of the 20th century, however, arrogance, pose, meaningless flinging are alien to him. Classical composition, striving for equilibrium, musical rhythm and harmony of forms bear testimony to the spiritual calmness of the artist, his aspirations to remain young."

Painter Dalia Mataitė:

"Always very productive, a real professional, open-hearted colleague, honest man. Not often one can find such a fine collection of characteristics in one person. Today, looking back on the past years we can state that he made a weighty contribution to the cultural growth of our theater.

He was especially concerned with launching a wonderful and very important tradition - the Trianale of the theater art in the Baltic's. Only a few really understand how much strength the making of this exhibition required. I am fascinated by Percov's business-like efficiency, his active participation in the process of life".

Actor Artiom Inozemcev:

"No matter in which theater he worked, he always worked for the theater, not for something else. When creating his scenery he penetrates the conception of each stage director, listens to the actors and together with them discloses that conception on the stage. When I saw Percov's model for my play of short tragedies "A stingy knight" and "A stone guest" by A.S. Pushkin (it was a black box which had a place for each character), it struck me that the Knight would be the central figure in the play."

Admirers of Jewish theater remember that in 1960s M. Percov created scenery for the plays of Jewish people's theater, then headed by a real master of stage direction Leonid Lurje. M. Percov was the stage designers of such Lurje's plays as "The wise men of Chelm", "Do not say it is your last trip", "Musicians", "Wandering stars".

Jewish theme prevailed in M. Percov's works of recent years. Many of our readers remember masterfully painted cycle of canvases in which the artist with profound feeling recreates images of the unique and eternally lost Jewish past in Lithuania: "The Ghetto", "Jewish Yards in the Old Town Vilnius". No less impressive was the cycle of his graphic works "Traditional Jewish Handicrafts", "Wooden Architecture in Vilnius", "Old Town Vilnius".

Even in his appearances outside theater M. Percov remains a deeply histrionic personality and artist. Participants of Sunday lectures at the Jewish Community of Lithuania remember the meeting with M. Percov where he exhibited his paintings, inspired by Josif Utkin's poem "A story of the red-haired Motele". At one point M. Percov like an actor performed the poem.

It is necessary to tell about Percov's new project. Several years ago he established an art studio in the Jewish school. Studio's works won the recognition in Lithuania and abroad. Paintings by M. Percov's students are exhibited in the Jewish Center in New York, they participated and won prizes at the world exhibition dedicated to the 3000th anniversary of Jerusalem.

On his jubilee exhibition the painter presented a titanic project that could be beyond the powers of many young artists. M. Percov created 12 plastic compositions on the themes of Shakespeare's plays. Unrestrained by modernism and postmodernism, routinism and other "isms" he created unrestricted and harmonious stage models for seven tragedies: "Othello", "Hamlet", "Macbeth", "King Lear", "Romeo and Juliet", "Richard III", "Coriolanus" and five comedies: "The two Gentlemen of Verona", "The Taming of the Shrew", "Much Ado about Nothing", "Twelfth Night", "The Merry Wives of Windsor".

Michail Percov has celebrated his 80th anniversary. He leads a quiet life, does not demand attention for his personality. However, his talent, wisdom and diligence do not leave him alone, arouse interest in his creativity.

Prepared by
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On the occasion of the Day of Crowning of Mindaugas (Day of Statehood) Michail Percov was awarded the Fifth Class Order of the Great Duke of Lithuania Gediminas. The artist and stage designer was decorated with the Order for his merits to the state of Lithuania, for making Lithuania's name famous all around the world, for his contribution to Lithuania's integration into the world society.

The Jewish Community of Lithuania and the editors of our newspaper congratulate M. Percov and wish him long and creative years.

THE SAGA OF THE TRIBE OF LITVAKS CONTINUES

Each time my schoolmate Sara, who now lives in the same city as I do, in Petach Tikva, calls me I know what she is going to say: "Take a look at the latest issue of "Jewish tuning-fork". Kanovich has published his new article there. Its a real miracle..."

Sometimes Kanovich's articles appear in a very reputable Russian newspaper "News of the week".

There is nothing strange about my classmate Sara being an admirer of Grigorij Kanovich's publicistic writings: she was born in Vilnius and knows the author personally. However, many thousands of those who have never even seen the writer also read G. Kanovich. They read him, because they are anxious to learn his far from the prevalent opinion. Opinion non - templet, non superficial, casting a new, fresh light on actual issues of today, introducing to the reader unexpected perspectives.

By the way, Lithuanian Jews are very well aware of G. Kanovich's sharp publicistic pen. It is true though that his publicistic writings are not that often to bee seen in the press. But when one or another Russian or Lithuanian periodical does publish Kanovich's article, it is being widely discussed for a long time. Let us take for example his "Jewish camomile" that startled Jewish minds all around the world.

I began narrating about G. Kanovich - a new immigrant who very quickly got used to the new way of life or, as we say here, got absorbed, became famous and popular among Russian speaking readers. And these are not only his articles that readers enjoy. Passages from his novels, novels with sequels, novels that had already been published in various languages but were available only in an unknown Lithuania have been published over and over again in Israeli periodicals.

I remember when 15-20 years ago Jews from different corners of USSR came to rest and have some treatment in Druskininkai and Palanga. Their desires were to luxuriate under the Baltic sun, have a sip of mineral water, buy amber beads and ... G. Kanovich's novel. That is why his novels were mostly, and in large quantities, circulated in Lithuanian resorts. For Jews coming there it was a novelty, a discovery of a spiritual source.

Readers in Israel take his creativity in the same way - as a novelty, discovery of a spiritual source.

It took very little time for the passages from the novel "The park of Jews" to appear in the Israeli periodical press. By that time the author was already know among the different circles of society and his novel attracted widespread interest. "The park of Jews" was voted the best 1997 book in Russian published in Israel.

Recently another G. Kanovich's book "Murmur of fallen trees" appeared on the counters of Israeli bookshops. It is a story about writer's father, a complex personality, one of the last litvaks on Lithuanian soil. There is no doubt that readers will receive this book with the same enthusiasm.

10-12 years ago I had the honor of reviewing two G. Kanovich's novels - "A kid for two pennies" and "Smile to us, God" - in the world Jewish press. I also delivered a speech at the celebration writer's 60th (oh, how quickly the time goes by!).

A scene from the play "Smile to us, God" at the Small theatre (Vilnius).

I will repeat a few things which I said then. I think they are as actual today. Especially as the writer continues the saga of the tribe of Lithuanian Jews - litvaks. It does not matter that the same characters do not march any more from one novel to another as it used to be in previous works "Tears and prayers of the fools", "There is no paradise for slaves", "A kid for two pennies", "Smile to us, God", or in even earlier trilogy "Candles on the wind". Besides, those heroes cannot enter a new novel at least for one good reason - they and their heirs lie buried in more than two hundred places of mass killings scattered all over Lithuania.

Still, new fundamental works of G. Kanovich are a sequel of the saga of litvaks.

Many years ago in a narrow circle of literature lovers I heard an opinion that Jewish literature is not bilingual but many-lingual. If an author (of course, a Jew) in his/her work discusses Jewish theme and Jewish point of view, such work must be ascribed to Jewish literature. According to these criteria works by L. Feichtvanger, S. Belou, A. Rybakov and many other Jewish writers have been ascribed to Jewish literature. Definitely, this can be argued. Writings by G. Kanovich provoke fewer arguments, since a new, specific component is set here.

G. Kanovich's prose works are written in Russian. However, even his first story on Jewish theme "I am staring at the stars", written in 1960s, had a feeling of "Jewish trait", almost unexplainable singularity expressed by specific intonation, peculiar structure of sentences etc. These are the very characteristics that distinguish Jewish literature from the others.

In his later works that "trait" becomes more and more distinct, and I would even say more "Jewish".When one reads, for example "A kid for two pennies" or "Smile to us, God" one can feel it in every line, every sentence. And the fact that it is written in non - Jewish language slowly fades away. G.Kanovich's rich, expressive Russian language miraculously turns into a speech which people in a Jewish shtetl spoke for many generations. The speech is Russian, but the soul - Jewish! The same can be said about the language. Let us listen to its sounding, its intonation, let us take a closer look at the structure of sentences. The language sounds Jewish! (By the way, to hear that one must have ear tuned for Jewish speech).

The same applies to G. Kanovich's recent books.

I would like to remind yet another statement of mine which I voiced many years ago when the writer was still living in Lithuania, creating there and actively participating in Jewish and non Jewish communal and cultural life.

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