

Maria Shevtsova

Embodied Voice

Valery Nikolayevich
Galendeyev

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Open Class 2006. Photograph courtesy of the Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg-Theatre of Europe.

Valery Galendeyev seemed immortal, so steady was his demeanour, so light his ample frame. We knew that he had had serious Covid early in the pandemic but his habitual warmth and gentle irony belied his health's decline as he continued to work as if it would never stop. He understood, though, that, sooner rather than later, his growing ill health, which he discreetly set aside, would stop him.

Galendeyev was one of the truly great pedagogues of the world – a teacher of voice without equal, as I was privileged to see and hear for myself. This was not in the Theatre Institute of Leningrad, which became the Theatre Academy of St Petersburg and is now known as the Russian State Institute of Scenic Arts (RGISI), where he was legendary, forgotten by thousands and thousands of

students who had learned from his humanity and rigour. No, my learning was not in this illustrious institution but in his warm-up sessions before the performances, at home and abroad, of the Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg led by Lev Dodin. A remarkable theatre, which owed so much to Galendeyev, it was subsequently awarded an additional name: Theatre of Europe.

My knowledge of Galendeyev's work also developed through the many company rehearsals Dodin had allowed me to attend. Valery encouraged, suggested, and modified, understanding flawlessly what each actor required and when and why; and how to release the blockages and tensions, psychological and physical, that affected their creative freedom. His cumulative decades of close work with the Maly actors, during and since their student days, fed his colossal memory of each one of them. His love, devotion, insight, and intuition, but also firm hand, did the rest, constantly sustaining the ensemble power of this internationally renowned company, as well as the spirit of its individuals. His was that rare example of the later twentieth- and early twenty-first-century theatre of artistic focus, exploration, and creativity, renewed and ensured through continuity.

Galendeyev's voice practice was not about mere diction, although articulation was key to his exercises and method. Voice was not, for him, a matter of merely saying or singing words to be correctly said or sung and pleasing. Voice was *embodied* voice: it was inseparable from the body, from every muscle and sinew that moves and breathes and gives form to the living human being and the living heart that constitutes the actor.

The opera rehearsals that I attended were integral to my particular 'training', in that I saw absolutely clearly in them, not least during rehearsals at the mighty La Scala, just how

deep and fine was Valery's knowledge of music, and how musical was his sense of voice – voice as the physical score of the musicality of the word incarnate. Voice was the substance of the human being's sounding voice, and he developed each human being he taught to fulfil their greater capacities.

During these opera rehearsals, I recalled how Galendeyev taught the Maly actors to breathe and work bodily as they vocally ran through the funniest of sound combinations, tongue-twisting gibberish, clusters of related vowels or consonants to loosen tongues, sometimes nonsense rhymes, or actual poetry. Together, they shaped sound with movement, creating the musicality that fashioned them from without and from within, simultaneously. It was in these opera rehearsals that I began to understand the full scale and resonance of his imaginative innovations. None of them could be used directly for, or with, the singers at the hosting opera houses, which had their indomitable codes and ways. Yet Dodin's tempered directing of opera had long since absorbed a number of Galendeyev's basic principles, and they imbued his directorial work with singers in what, in any case, had evolved over the years into an unbreakable artistic unity between these steadfast collaborators.

It took me more years, more work, and more experience of a very wide range of theatre to understand acutely that Valery's was his very own version, his own embodiment, of Stanislavsky's phenomenal human and technical legacy, in which Stanislavsky's research on the voice and experimentation with voice, especially the voice of opera actor-singers, played such a huge part. Valery Galendeyev was a giant, standing on the shoulders of a giant who had established a multifarious Russian school of modern theatre; and, within this school, as in world theatre, Valery Galendeyev is, and will remain, a unique master.