

Lev Belotserkovski



This is my father Lev Belotserkovski in a performance at the Ivan Franko Drama Theater in Kiev in the 1930s. The photo is taken from my father's book of memoirs, *A Prompter's Notes*.

Unfortunately the original photo was lost. My father was born in Alexandria, Kirovograd region in 1896. He was the son of a poor craftsman named Gershl Belotserkovski. Thus, my father had to go to work at an early age. He was an errand-boy and a shop assistant. Life was dull and boring in Alexandria, and my father wanted to join a traveling circus to leave it. He got very fond of theater. The building of the town theater was situated on the main square in Alexandria. Traveling actors performed in this theater. Occasionally good actors came on tours. My father never missed a single

performance. He met several other young men that were fond of theater and they founded a drama club. In May 1912 something happened that determined my father's life. The Russian Tsarist Army Theater came on tour to Alexandria. They showed a Jewish play in which Gnat Yura, later a famous actor, performed. My father was very impressed by his acting. He met Yura after the performance. They became friends and my father often visited Yura at his home. Soon Yura Gnat had to leave Alexandria because of his military service. My father kept in touch with Yura's mother and sister. My father worked in this theater until 1919. He played minor roles. He spoke very beautiful Ukrainian and Terenti, Yura's brother helped him to become a prompter. My father often recalled the time of the development of the Surmy studio. They were trying to inspire people with hope for a better life and distract them from their everyday problems. In summer 1920 another important event happened. Gnat Yura came to visit his brother in Alexandria. He invited his brother and a few others, including my father, to Cherkassy where he was organizing the Ivan Franko Ukrainian Drama Theater. That summer my father moved to Cherkassy. From then on he worked in this theater. And so it happened that a young man from a poor Jewish family not only came to liking the Ukrainian language wholeheartedly, but also became one of the founders of a famous Ukrainian theater. My father went on tours to Ukrainian towns with the theater. In early 1923 the government issued an order for the Ivan Franko Theater to move to Kharkov, which was the capital of Ukraine at that time. In 1926 the theater was ordered to move to Kiev, the 'old' capital. Actors and employees were upset because they were losing their status of 'actors of the capital theater' to become 'provincial actors'. Nobody knew back then that Kiev would become the capital of Soviet Ukraine in 1932. My father earned little and we were poor, but my childhood was full of joy whenever my father took me to the theater with him where I watched unforgettable performances. My father wrote a book, his memoirs about the theater and the atmosphere there, and about nice talented people that he was lucky to work with. This book, entitled A Prompter's Notes was published by the Publishing House of Art and Musical Literature in Kiev, with an edition of 3,000 copies.