

Members Of The Satire Theater ‘Starshel’ [‘Hornet’]



These are members of the satire theater ‘Starshel’ [‘Hornet’]: (from left to right) Zahari Petrov, I, Radoi Ralin and Neicho Popov (late actor, very famous in Bulgaria). The picture was taken in Sofia, 1953.

The last year of my studies Radoi Ralin [Radoi Ralin (1923-2004), penname of Dimitar Stoyanov, was one of the greatest Bulgarian satirists during the totalitarian period] came to VITIZ to search for young students. I turned up immediately at the editorial office of the ‘Starshel’ satiric weekly where he was working then. Then he told me that the newspaper celebrated its anniversary every year - in the form of public reading usually - but he asked if we could think of something more theatrical. ‘Of course, we could’, I said. Then Zahari Petrov and Vasil Aprilov joined us with the question: ‘Where should we start from?’ I told them they already had it in the newspaper and suggested to start from the foreign policy articles. The newspaper then had a regular Friday material ‘Ridgeway in Europe’ - Ridgeway was the General Secretary of NATO then. So we made up several sketches - Ridgeway in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Turkey. And that was how we started.

We did create a play - every evening after the usual study exercises at VITIZ we gathered to rehearse the new performance - it was late in the evening after 10.30 p.m. - the authors watched us, corrected the text and on the other day we would rehearse again at the editorial offices of ‘Starshel’. I invited some colleagues, because Radoi wanted more actors - he wanted it to be a theater. I created the roles myself - I used to read the newspaper and pick up characters. A bit later Philip told my colleagues at VITIZ I had passed the final state exam because I had managed to create a performance out of nothing. The first night came out in 1953, after Stalin's death - after that we played it in many theaters and we were paid some money from the entrance tickets. We had a very good manager. We made a total of 16 performances, but then someone complained about certain passages in the text and Valko Chervenkov [Prime Minister and General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time (1950-1956)] called for Chelkash [Starshel's editor-in-

chief] and told him: 'You'd better occupy yourselves with the newspaper, there are people who will do the theater.' That is how the performances were stopped - but it was a brilliant show - the theaters were overcrowded.

We graduated in 1953 and we had to fulfill our military duty as candidate-officers at the military school in Kyustendil. When we came back in August, we were called by Slavcho Vasev [a journalist and one of the people in charge of the cultural issues at the Ministry of Culture] - and he sent us to Dimitrovgrad to form a theater there. So I set off for Dimitrovgrad. I married in the summer of 1954. My wife was then studying industrial chemistry in Sofia. We knew each other yet from the Sofia period of the Mayakovsky club. She, Lilyana Kirilova Mandicheva, was one of the singers at the club. In the middle of the theater season (1954-1955) I left Dimitrovgrad and came back to Sofia where I couldn't find a job. Ivan Bashev, who was then Minister of Culture, did not allow Albert Angel to hire me at the Selski [Village] Theater, situated in the Sofia town center opposite the Sofia University, because I had left the Dimitrovgrad Theater.