

AFISHA

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Title of the article - John Pepper: "I was happy to work with such artists"

The Theatre on Vasilevsky premiered a new play "My dear Mathilde" based on the piece written by an American play writer Israel Horovitz, directed by John Pepper. The nearest performance - June 20.

John Pepper - famous western director, actor, photographer. He directed a number of plays in theatres in France, Italy, Sweden, the USA, among which are: "Underneath the Lintel" by Glen Berger, "The Retreat from Moscow" by William Nicholson, "Danny and the Deep Blue Sea" by John Patrick Shanley, plays based on pieces by Somerset Maugham and others.

- John, we are stunned by your language abilities - it seems you can speak all the foreign languages. It is a common idea, that the mother-tongue is considered to be the one you think in. Which language you personally recognize as your mother-tongue?

- I was born and raised in Italy, so my first language was Italian. This is the language, that expresses my joy of life, my passion, my admiration of the others. I noticed that here in Russia people speak as quickly, passionately and energetic as they live, just like Italians. My parents are Americans, I come from a creative family. My mother is a sculptor Beverly Pepper, my father is a writer Bill Curtis Pepper, my sister Jody Graham is a winner of the Pulitzer prize, professor of rhetoric in the Harvard University. I was raised in Europe, so logically with time I learned several languages. I studied at school in France, the language of Descartes helped me to mold logical thinking, sometimes I think and count in it. However I solve business issues and often work with actors in English. I speak Spanish when I want to express extreme sensuality and sexiness. Italian I use to talk about food, politics and women. This is exactly the language which is best to use when you are angry - you can very easy switch from fury to laughter.

- How did you life and creative biography was building? You are an artist, photographer, script writer, director... Which of these fields is the main for you?

- I used to be an actor, when I was growing in Italy, further I worked with the famous director Joseph Losey. Joe played an important role in my professional

career: he gave me my first job as the assistant to director in Rome and Paris. Exactly there I got to know one of my future mentor, with whom later I also worked as an assistant to director - with George Roy Hill ("Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid", "Slap Shot" and other films). Eduardo de Filippo was my second mentor - I spent two years with him and was his last protégé. As a result I have directed Eduardo de Filippo's play "Inner Voices" on the festival of Spoleto, where I was the youngest director. Having a great desire to become a director, I tended to get to know all the stages of the process that actors go through. I studied in an acting school in Los Angeles. I am not an actor, but my life experience helped me to get to know actors - to understand what they feel, how vulnerable they are and how heavy is their responsibility that they carry regardless whether in it cinema or theatre. Knowing this and being a director, I try not speak much. But I never feel that I manage to do this, when my inner voice tells me: ""To many words!"

- When you were a child you were filmed in a movie with great Elizabeth Taylor. What do you recall about these events?

- I love this story because it illustrates my debut in movie industry, showing real moral and relationship which I have been later revealing over and over again while working in Hollywood. I was seven years old, my parents and I were on vacation in Ostia, not far from Rome. I was bored, so I had to entertain myself by helping a worker to wharf boats. A man came to me and started talking, but I was taught not to speak with strangers, so I ran to my parents. The stranger came there and introduced himself - he was assistant to the director Joseph Mankiewicz and was organizing casting for "Cleopatra" which was being filmed that time in Rome. Every day were rehearsed a big scene - Cleopatra arrives in Rome, where she introduces her son to his father Julius Caesar. Every day I had to go up the platform on top of a giant Sphinx - it seemed an endless rout. This platform was carried by African slaves from each side, their task was to hold it still and walk down where Caesar (Rex Harrison) and Marc Anthony (Richard Barton). Frankly speaking I was a little worried each time, but tried my best not to show it. I had to sit together with Elizabeth Taylor, so I was very serious about my work. Remember, I was a little boy. And finally the big day when Taylor, Barton and Harrison were on the set. I took my place on the platform and sat down. Taylor was sitting in a throne, her hands on her knees, which were 20 cm from my face. I remember very well her bright green sweat shirt with high collar and golden stripes (in August in Rome), her canary-colored silk trousers. She wore elegant leather sandals with the same golden stripes and her toe nails were painted scarlet (all these details are easy to remember for a bored child). Surely, the men holding the platform were a bit nervous, because of Elizabeth Taylor herself being on the

platform, so the platform was slightly uneven. And that was enough for Taylor! Taking a tight grip on her throne she started screaming with loud strident voice: "Dick! Dick! Dick!" - addressing to Barton. I was a good-mannered little boy, so I looked at her and said with a slight Italian accent: "Please don't worry Ms. Taylor, I was also scared in the beginning, but you will get used to it very soon". She stared at me and pointing with her index finger one millimeter from my nose said: "Hey, Charlie, you take care of your skin, and I will take care of mine". This is how I entered the show-business world ... and I'm still there.

- What was attractive to you about "My dear Mathilde"? How did you get along with Russian actors?

- Well, I never make decisions whether to direct a play if I do not feel my personal connection with the material. With "My dear Mathilde" it was as follows. Firstly, I did not only knew and admired very much earlier works of Israel Horovitz, I also had a chance to work with him about 20 years ago, when I was producing a movie for Warner Brothers in Hollywood. As it sometimes happens with projects in Hollywood, the movie was never released though, however I noted the talent of this writer, his ability to structure the text and his wonderful dialogs. That is why when his French agent Marie Sessile Renault of AgencyMCR called with a proposal to direct Horovitz' play I got immediately interested. And when she specified that it is to be done in Saint Petersburg, I got excited - I fell in love with your city when I arrived here for the first time invited by Marina Jigarkhanyan (sister of Armen Jigarkhanyan) to take part in Photovernissage in CEH "Manege" in 2012 with a series of my photo-works. And finally it turned out that I would be working with Russian actors in Russian, which I do not speak. So it was a challenge which I really should go for right now, when I am somewhat older than fifty. In my opinion this age is the beginning of a great period of an artist's life. The ingredients are incredible - American playwright, events take place in Paris where I lived for 20 years, Russian actors directed by an Italian director... I can imagine, the French would say: "What an impossible ratatouille!" And then I read the play and it spoke to me really. I pictured the situation: a middle aged man Mathias spends his last money to travel to Paris where he inherited his father's apartment. He is looking forward to sell quickly this huge apartment overlooking the Luxemburg Garden and start his life over. However, when he arrives, Mathias finds out that together with the apartment he inherited an old lady Mathilde and her daughter Chloe, who hates him and makes his life impossible. The situation is uncommon, comic, the psychology of each character is interesting. While rehearsing I realized why I got so close with this play: it is about a very selfish lady, charming towards everybody, but her own child, this play is about children

who never knew parental affection, which they desperately needed, and about children who felt lonely throughout their lives. This play tells about mothers with no maternal instinct and weak fathers unable to act like men. This is a story about passion and finally love, which was found in the end of life. I am familiar with such pain and tribulations, just like I am very well acquainted with a sarcastic style of the main characters of the play, which they make use of to protect themselves. I always dreamt to work with Russian actors, moreover in the beginning of my career I studied the Stanislavsky's system. I knew methodology, main principles and I used some of them while working with European actors, but I was hoping to experience this system, so to say - straight from the source. And I was truly happy that I finally got this chance. This is great pleasure for me to work with such great cast - Elena Rakhlenko, Dmitry Vorobiev, Natalia Kruglova. The depth and talent of Dmitry - these are like treasures from Ali Baba's cave - there is everything. Elena's experience, her dignity and nobility towards her partners, her ability to listen are so great, that they made me run to our rehearsals and see what the new day is going to give us. Natalia's sense of humor and ability to orient quickly. All these make this cast a dream team!