

said, and they had done a very fine job. In the centre of a spacious square in front of the theatre was a large fountain lighted from below in constantly changing colours, of which they were particularly proud. They then walked back again to the hotel and reluctantly said goodbye, asking me to take their friendliest greetings to Canada when I returned.

As a sample of students from a trade-school, they made a good impression. They had no ambition to go on for higher education and seemed satisfied that the course they had chosen would give them an interesting occupation and a good living. Two of them were Russian and one Uzbek, but all had been born in Tashkent and spoke both languages. None of them was bookish but all were fond of reading and had seen many operas, ballets and plays. All were convinced that ordinary people like themselves everywhere in the world wanted peace and were optimistic that war could be avoided.

By the time we got back to the hotel, I had noticed that

the famous Uzbek folk dancer and singer Tamara Khanum, whom I had heard when she had visited Norway with a Soviet cultural delegation in 1953, was giving a concert that evening in the theatre on the same street as the hotel, and said that I would like to go. My guide said that she was an old friend of his and that he would like to accompany me.

We had seats in the front row. Tamara Khanum was in good form and gave an exacting program of folk songs and dances from many countries — Chinese, Korean, Indian, Spanish, Hungarian, Finnish, Russian, Norwegian and, of course, Uzbek — and sang all the songs in the original languages. When we went back stage to speak to her in the intermission, I said that I was probably the only person in the audience that night who understood her Norwegian, which was excellent. She had performed in Oslo and several other cities and had thoroughly enjoyed her Norwegian tour, but Trondheim seemed to have made the strongest appeal. She presented me with three beautiful roses and insisted that I sit down. She had to stay on her

John Watkins: An appreciation

"The director of the Art Museum in Tashkent, an Uzbek woman of about 35 and herself a painter, made a tour of the collection with us, but called on the curator of the West European part to help with the explanations. She was a Russian woman, well over 50, with an ugly troll-like face and dyed hair of an improbable reddish hue, but she was extremely well versed in her subject, spoke concisely and well and had a good sense of humour. She made sure that we did not miss seeing a French nineteenth century painting of a husband who had suddenly returned home and caught his wife with her lover. I said that it reminded me of a French cartoon in which the husband was pointing a gun at the lover and the wife was screaming: 'Don't shoot the father of your children!' This delighted her hugely and she kept chuckling over it for the rest of the tour. The dignified director, whose sense of humour was less robust, smiled slightly."

This incident took place during a trip to Central Asia by John Watkins in the autumn of 1954. He was then Canadian Ambassador to the Soviet Union and made an extensive tour of the republics of Central Asia, which lie in an area bounded by the Caspian Sea on the west, Iran and Afghanistan on the south, China on the east and Siberia on the north. In the past, the role of this area was that of a land bridge conveying countless caravans and armies into the Near East. In the late fourteenth century, it was the centre of the empire of Tamerlane.

John Watkins was born in 1902. As a student, he had specialized in Norse literature and North European affairs generally. He held a Ph.D. from Cornell University and worked for many years with the American Scandinavian Foundation in New York. He taught in the University of Manitoba for two years before joining the Department of External Affairs in 1946. He was first posted to the Canadian Embassy in Moscow during the late 1940s, and returned there as Ambassador in the mid-Fifties. He was an Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs between 1956 and 1958, when he was appointed Ambassador to Denmark. He died in Montreal in 1964.

From the beginning of his stay in Moscow, he was an avid traveller. His narratives often include humorous anecdotes about the troubles of travel in the Soviet Union at that time. They are also rich in information about the life-style of the Soviet peoples, and frequently provide sharp insights into their outlook and ambitions.

The excerpts from some of his more notable travelogues have also been compiled to illustrate his own outlook on life. Everyone who had the good fortune to know John Watkins had the warmest affection for him. He was interested in everyone he met and was the kindest, most generous friend anyone could have. He was a man of formidable erudition, widely read in many fields and many languages. He was a linguist of genius and used his gift to acquire a deep insight into the literature, history and life of many countries. He was also a talented musician and a serious student of music.

The Scandinavian languages and peoples were his first love, but Russian, acquired relatively late in life, was a close second. Within a few months of his first arrival in Moscow in 1948, he was passably fluent in Russian and before the end of his first posting there in 1951 he had acquired and read an immense library of Russian literature and had advanced in the spoken language to the point where he could converse easily and naturally with anyone he met. And no one (in those cold war days) met more people. Leaders in government and the arts, academics and writers, and all kinds of people encountered on his wide travels — all responded to his friendly, witty, curiosity and added to his vast store of knowledge and anecdote about the country and the life of its people.

With all his learning, he was down to earth and unassuming, still close in many ways to his Ontario farm origins. He loved to shock Russians by calling himself a *kulak* — the thrifty, independent peasant farmer of pre-revolutionary Russia.

Whether *kulak* or musician or linguist or scholar or diplomat, he was a person of rare worth whose memory is always fresh to his friends in many lands.