



Photo: Dragon Rulu

The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming!

Artist and businessman both part of Moscow Circus Tour

Moscow Circus Coliseum
Run ends November 1

Interviews by Elaine Ostry

Putting together a successful tour is a difficult task, demanding the best of financial and artistic skills. The Moscow Circus has evidently worked to achieve this combination. I had the opportunity to talk to two people involved with each of these aspects: Donald K. Donald, a concert and theatre entrepreneur; and Marina Osinskaya, a

ballerina on the high wire.

Donald owns the Periscope and Donald K. Donald corporations, and arranges rock shows across Canada. His associate Gerry Grundman made contacts with Russians during the hockey exchange of 1962, and became, according to Donald, "fascinated with circus life".

When Grundman approached Donald with the suggestion that he support a Canadian tour of the Moscow Circus, Donald was initially wary of the idea. But, he says, "you don't come near these people without

falling in love with them." He stresses that with the Moscow Circus, "it's nothing political; it's people."

The Moscow Circus toured Canada in 1977, but their '83 tour was cancelled due to the furor over the KAL 007 airplane controversy. The performers were kept in a hotel in Halifax for three weeks before being allowed to return home. "It was the classic example of governments gone crazy," comments Donald.

Now, the Soviet and Canadian governments are co-operating again. The Canadian government wants to, as Donald says, "erase the memory of the stupidity of 1983," and Gorbachev "wants to export the new feeling" present in Russia.

Donald is obviously impressed with the high standards of the Russian performers. He notes the great dedication they give to their art. "Canadian groups," he comments, "have to lose their prima donna attitude."

Marina Osinskaya is one of those dedicated performers to whom Donald is referring. Speaking through an interpreter, she told me that she comes from a circus family and has been training on the wire since childhood. Her father was a famous circus performer, and her mother was also a ballerina on the high wire. Osinskaya was constantly on tour as a child, with no "home base." "We spent two and a half months in each city," she says, "and six months in each major city."

Osinskaya has toured South America, Europe, the States and Canada as well as the Soviet Union. The travel is one of the many privileges of being a circus performer in the Soviet Union; there, circus artists are revered as much as ballet dancers.

"Europe has more culture," Osinskaya observes. "The experience is more enriching than America." She cites Paris, where she spent two and a half months, as an example of this experience.

Although Osinskaya stresses that she has had "little interaction" with the inhabitants of the countries in which she tours, she states that the Soviets have "a different way of life" from the North Americans. "Life is simpler in

the Soviet Union," she says, emphasizing the Soviet emphasis on friendship and community ties.

According to Osinskaya, there is much contact among the arts in the Soviet Union, especially in Moscow. "There is the union of theatrical performers, and clubs where artists meet and share views." There is a lot of exchange of performers among the different art forms. For instance, Osinskaya says, circus performers "may be invited to perform with a ballet company." Osinskaya herself once acted in a movie in her "free time."

Gorbachev's reforms have changed the arts community in the Soviet Union during the past two years, claims Osinskaya. The changes are most evident "in theatre, in works of literature now being published, and in plays written in the sixties now being shown." There has not, however, been an effect on the circus, which is hardly politically controversial.

Osinskaya is apparently immersed in her work and the circus life. When asked the obvious question "do you get nervous on the wire?", she smiled and answered: "Of course. But it's my profession."



Photo: Elaine Ostry

Marina Osinskaya dances on the high wire

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