

One woman tells all...

NIKA award winner Darya Yekamasova speaks of draniki, luck and Jeanne d'Arc

At the NIKA Film Awards, Darya was named 'best actress' for *There Once Was a Country Woman*, which has made her a star. Directed by Andrey Smirnov, it has won 'best film', while Mr. Smirnov has been awarded the title of 'best script writer'. Shot partially in Belarus, the acclaimed film has brought Darya amazing recognition. Critics are comparing her role to that of Elina Bystritskaya in *Quiet Flows the Don*, noting her unique portrait and melodious village-style manner of speech.

Dasha, you've already played over ten roles — including in *Doctor Zhivago*, *Spartak* and *Kalashnikov*, *Live and Remember*, *The Soldier's Decameron*, *Free Swimming* and *Split*. When did you realise that you wanted to become an actress?

I was five when I saw *'A Guest from the Future'*, which prompted me to tell my mother that I wanted to appear in films. However, I had no chance of becoming an actress.

Why?

My mother heads a kindergarten and my father is in the military. They wanted me to become a musician but, in my first year of studies at the Musical College, I was accidentally shot in a crowd scene for a film, which resulted in Mosfilm requesting my photo. Director Andrey Proshkin was looking for a girl to play in *'Spartak and Kalashnikov'* and was shown my photo.

Have you studied at a theatre institute?

I graduated from the Russian University of Theatre Arts — after several attempts to enrol.

What connects you with Belarus?

I spent around three years of my early childhood here, while my father was at a military garrison.

Where were you born?

I was born in Moscow but I love Belarus and draniki (potato pancakes). I've always enjoyed close ties with Belarus. Moreover, *'There Once Was a Country Woman'* was shot both in the Tambov Region and in Belarus, so I visited both locations.

What did you shoot in Belarus?

The indoor scenes — over two months; Valery Todorovsky's studio is situated in Minsk, where it's cheaper to work.

How was the casting organised?

The casting took ages. I had to play a Russian woman who is thrown out of her village, having her house burnt down. All of her husbands were killed during WWI, the Revolution, the civil war and the Tambov rebellion of peasants. The actors were found through open casting, with only two coming directly. One such was Roman Madyanov — whom Mr. Smirnov noticed in Gleb Panfilov's soap opera *'First Round'* (in which he played a state security minister and then a prisoner). According to Mr. Smirnov, Roman 'decorated' the film. The other was People's Artiste of Russia Vsevolod Shilovsky, for whom the role of a priest was written especially.

Irina Bessarabova's *Drunken Men's Conversation* explains how *There Once Was a Country Woman* was shot. In particular, her film discloses the hard conditions under which you worked. Your character was repeatedly showered with water and fell into pits. Which was most



Actress Darya Yekamasova on set for shooting

difficult?

It wasn't easy to learn the dialect used by Tambov peasants some time ago. The flood scene was also extremely difficult. I had to be yanked out of the water by a rope and, at one moment, failed to take a breath. I then sank below the surface.

Andrey Smirnov had a 29 year break from filming, choosing to retire from the profession due to censorship. However, in December 1988, he suddenly woke at 3am, realising that he simply had to film Tambov's rebellion. Why was this topic chosen?

He says that no other topic is as important. In 1917, 83 percent of the population called themselves peasants — according to a census. In winter, men worked in factories but went to the fields in spring. Then, this social class completely disappeared. Lenin asserted that the October Revolution aimed to end the power of merchants and capitalists but, in reality, no other class suffered as much as the peasants and clergy. They formed the original Russian mentality, which gave birth to our great Russian culture.

How did the film gain its title?

As Mr. Smirnov explains, his views on the civil war as a national tragedy were formed from reading Russian classical literature. The film names 12 writers whose ideas were used to write the script: among them are Bunin, Shmelev, Chekhov and Leskov. One of Leskov's wonderful works — *'The Life of a Woman'* — inspired the title of the film; it narrates the awful fate of a country woman.

It seems you only act in historical movies: *There Once Was a Country Woman* is about the civil war, while *Split* (where you played Priest Avvakum's wife) narrates the split within the Russian Orthodox Church. How did you prepare for these roles?

I've loved history since childhood, as my grandfather knew so much. I performed in Nikolay Dostal's historical *'Split'*, as Avvakum's wife, while simultaneously rehearsing at Theatre.Doc. It was a complicated yet interesting period. I'd be silent from 8am to 8pm, before hurrying to the theatre to rehearse the very modern *'Life is Successful!'* I'd come

home in the early hours of the morning, returning to work a couple of hours later.

One of your recent roles was in *Legend 17* — directed by talented Nikolay Lebedev (a laureate of Russia's State Award). Tell us more...

The film is devoted to legendary Soviet hockey player Valery Kharlamov. I played his sister, while his mother was played by Spanish Alejandra Grepí. Boris Shcherbakov played his father. This film is about his rising star... and about human dignity...

What was your last cinema role?

In Andrey Stempkovsky's film (preliminarily entitled *'Murder'*). I don't know when it will be released. It was also interesting to work with Alexey Fedorchenko, who wrote *'Ovsyanka'*. His new film — *'The Heavenly Wives of Field Mari'* — comprises several women's stories, on an ethnic theme.

At which theatre are you performing?

At Theatre.Doc, on *'Life is Successful!'* (based on Belarusian Pavel Pryazhko's script). It won a 'Golden Mask' prize. In Pavel's love story, my young character originates from a Minsk suburb. There's no set: just 15 black chairs in front of the audience. The only costume is a bridal veil. The performance is staged in the 'concert-style opera' manner.

Do you consider yourself to be lucky?

Yes. I've worked with such directors as Alexander Proshkin, Boris Khlebnikov, Andrey Smirnov, Stempkovsky and Fedorchenko.

Which role do you dream of?

I'd love to play a significant character — like Jeanne d'Arc.

Bolshoi Theatre setting off on grand tour

Belarusian Opera and Ballet Theatre to tour Europe

By Alexander Pimenov

According to the theatre's General Director, Vladimir Gridyushko, touring promotes friendly relations and stronger cultural ties between theatres in the field of ballet, opera and symphony art. Accordingly,

the Belarusian theatre has concluded memorandums of co-operation with the largest troupes across Europe and the CIS — including Russia's Bolshoi Theatre, the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Academic Music Theatre, the Kiev National

Opera, the National Opera and Ballet of Sofia, the Estonian National Opera, the National Theatre in Belgrade, the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Odessa Opera and Ballet Theatre.

In late 2011, the theatre saw success in Western Eu-

rope. After a long break, the national ballet troupe and the symphonic orchestra gave worthy performances in Spain, Germany and Austria. This May, the Belarusian ballet company will bring its *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *La Baydère* to Spain. Italy will welcome

them in August, with the Netherlands and Belgium receiving them in September-October. The troupe's performance at the National Opera and Ballet Theatre of Lithuania traditionally takes place in October and they will premiere their *Sleeping Beauty* at the Pal-

ais des Congress de Paris in mid-October. The October schedule also includes 15 shows of *Troubadour* opera in the Netherlands and Belgium and, next spring, the Belarusian troupe will make its first appearance in the UK — with *La Traviata* and *Madame Butterfly*.



Swan Lake performance at National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre