

'I picked up the same glass of champagne as Tarantino'

Igor Sigov tells us about his new position, walking the red carpet and the realisation of his dream

Honoured Artiste of Belarus Igor Sigov (in the photo) is one of the brightest and most popular Belarusian actors, having worked with the Republican Theatre of Belarusian Drama for twenty years. Moreover, he has been a leading figure since very early on, appearing in around a hundred screen and stage roles. He has received various awards from festivals and boasts the Frantsisk Skorina Medal for his outstanding professional mastery and significant personal contribution to the development of national culture and arts.

In theatrical circles, he is very well thought of, having gained a reputation for giving himself heart and soul to each role. He also has the respect of audiences; some female fans come to the theatre especially to see Sigov. Recently, his fans were excited to hear that he has been appointed as the theatre's director. Does this mean the end of his acting career? We meet the great man himself to find out more.

Was your appointment one you hoped for?

I never dreamt of being a director, since it's not a creative position. However, my health (last year, he suffered a heart attack) means that I can't now perform on stage to the same degree. My doctors have advised me to have a break for a while. My year as director will give me this opportunity, so I'll do my best to fulfil my role well.

Will you refrain from acting for the whole year?

I'm primarily an actor, as I enjoy this occupation and am proud of my achievements. Certainly, I won't perform as often as before but I hope that I won't be forgotten as an actor as a result.

You used to be successfully involved in various sports, winning the 800m in your native Polotsk. How did this fit in with your acting life?

I wasn't born to a theatrical family but I do have some relatives who played the harmonica and sang well on festive occasions. My loved ones say that I've taken a little bit from everyone, so my acting gene comes from folk creativity. As far as my adoration of theatre is concerned, it began during my school years. One friend invited me to go with him to a theatre studio. I enjoyed myself and kept going. It was headed by director Valentina Nagornaya, who inspired my love of acting.

Did the Theatre Institute notice you immediately?

The first time I applied was in 1986, after school, but I failed the second round. The same year, I tried to enter the Culture Institute's Stage Direction course and also failed. I returned to Polotsk, worked at a factory and then went into the army. When I came back, continued working and began going to the theatre studio again; to be more exact, because of my age, I joined an amateur theatre group.

I still wanted to enter the Culture Institute and was even enrolled in preparatory courses, but found myself near the Academy of Arts and



Actor Igor Sigov gives worthy performance as division commander in *Dnieper Line*

decided to drop in. At that moment, director Valery Mazynsky came out of a room, saw me and said: 'That's enough standing there. Come in. If you become too nervous, you won't be able to read anything'. I had some materials to hand, since I was planning my application to university, so I took my bag from my shoulder and gave the audition my all. I was listened to, passing the first round and the second, and then the third. During the fourth round, I was told that I'd gained entry. At first, I didn't believe it.

A fateful moment!

Yes. However, after my first unsuccessful application, my grandmother told my fortune in the cards and was adamant that my dream would come to fruition within 3-4 years. In 1990, I became a student of the Academy of Arts, so she was right.

Since graduating, you've remained faithful to the Theatre of Belarusian Drama, working there since its foundation. Being so popular, were you never invited to join larger troupes?

I received proposals from the Kupala Theatre and the Russian Theatre, but my native walls kept me here.

It's probably because my acting career began here and I've endured so much with them. With the rest of the theatre, I survived the rather difficult period after our first artistic leader left. Moreover, I experienced my first true success here. I actually feel like I know every nail of the building; as students, we used to come here to arrange the seating and furnish the rooms.

Do you prefer the theatre or cinema?

Both are interesting, having their own advantages. Cinema offers particular features and requires certain skills, while paying more than the theatre. They involve completely different abilities though, since theatre must be your life. How many seconds are you on screen in a film, and how long is each shot? On stage, you need to keep audiences' attention for 90 minutes. Sometimes, even those without professional training can act successfully in films but this is extremely difficult to do on stage. You can't become a true actor without being trained, unless you are a unique genius. I prefer the theatre although I also like cinema.

In cinema, you mostly play spies, saboteurs and military men — do-

mestic and foreign. Which roles are directors yet to 'see' in you?

I don't know. It's better to ask the directors. As an actor, I'd like to think that I'm able to play any role, by 'pressing the necessary button'. Most recently, I've played a lover in a new film by director Ivan Pavlov: the husband of the female lead. I hope to gradually expand my range.

You've long been the theatre's sex-symbol. What do you think about that?

Of course, it's very pleasant for any male actor to be recognised and admired by women, being given attention. However, this status obliges you to keep fit!

Do you have to endure 'attack' from your most ardent fans? Do they wait at the theatre exit after each performance?

I sit inside for too long for them to wait for me but I have found notes attached to my car windscreen, thanking me for my work and for 'being me'. Of course, they don't know what I'm like in real life; seeing me on stage, they create the idea of their ideal man. Thank God, I play roles which enable women to keep alive their hopes that

true men still exist.

You played the male lead in Irish film director Juanita Wilson's *Door*, dedicated to the Chernobyl disaster. It was nominated for an Academy Award for 'Best Live Action Short Film' and, two years ago, you were invited to the Oscars solemn awards ceremony in Los Angeles, walking the famous red carpet. Tell us about your work on this film and about your impressions of Hollywood.

I auditioned quite by chance, in Kiev and Minsk. Many actors tried but I was lucky. It was very interesting to work on the film, although the film director hardly spoke Russian and I don't speak English. We managed to find a common language though and the film has done well. Before being nominated for an 'Oscar', it was successfully presented at several European film festivals.

As far as my impressions of the red carpet are concerned, I felt a mixture of joy, excitement and, even, some fear. I was going weak at the knees. I could hardly smile in a carefree manner while walking alongside world cinema stars I'd previously only seen on TV: Sarah Jessica Parker, Sandra Bullock and Meryl Streep. At the reception, I unexpectedly picked up a glass of champagne at the same time as Tarantino. He apologised but, of course, it was me who yielded, saying 'no problem'. I smoked a cigarette while Keanu Reeves stood just 2 metres beside me, discussing something with his agent.

You are currently the first and only Belarusian actor to have walked the red carpet. How does that feel?

I felt only great excitement at the time. However, on returning, I realised that one of my dreams had been brought to life. I believe that it's the dream of every actor to walk the red carpet in Hollywood, even if they deny it.

Which of your dreams remain unrealised?

I'm afraid to have such dreams, just in case they suddenly come true. A dream is something unreachable: a goal worth working towards. Of course, I do have dreams. I want to live longer, to work and to achieve something, although I understand that I already boast more than most people ever achieve: in a creative and 'real life' context. Thank God, my career has proven more active than that of others — who also deserve recognition.

I have a family and two wonderful children whom I love greatly: a 22 year old son and a daughter who recently celebrated her 17th birthday. I don't own my home, as I live in a service flat, but I dream of building a small house. I need a significant sum of money for this but I can't currently earn the sums I used to, since I can't act at present. In my post as director, I have to reject most offers, as I'm physically limited due to my health. However, I'm not living on the street and whatever happens, happens for the best, so I'm ok.