

Today I would like to speak about famous Messerer family which gave to a world recognized performers and teachers, in ballet, and cinema and drama art theatre.



The one who gave a start to this triumphant era and became one of most famous - was Asaf Messerer. He was born in a territory of modern Vilnius, 19.11.1903, back then, when city belonged to Russian empire, fourth child in a big family, where there were four more kids born later on. Five of eight of them grew up and had artistic careers. Their father was a dentist, and mother was a housewife, taking a care of kids. Both of parents were educated, father had fluently spoken several languages. Later, In 1907 the family moved from Vilnius to Moscow. Asaf had a regular childhood, studied in normal school and was considering of becoming an archaeologist in future. But in 1919th, Asaf for first time in his life saw a ballet performance. It was "Coppelia" in Bolshoi theater. He was thrilled with what he has seen and he felt - that dance - is what he has to dedicate his life for. However he was already 16 years old at that time - an age when ballet students are about to graduate, but not at all to make their first steps. Asaf shared his thoughts with his sister Rahel, and they both went to ballet academy to try to get an audition, but, expectedly, he was told that he is too old to start ballet. He didn't give up though and attended amateur ballet classes in one of private schools in Moscow. Despite of such a late start, he was progressing fast. Soon, one of his teachers became Alexander Gorsky, famous choreographer, whose main place of work was in Bolshoi as a choreographer and ballet master. How comes that such a big figure that Gorsky was, appeared in a small private school as a teacher? This was partially because of Soviet narrative or art popularization and making it accessible to any talented youngsters, independently on their social status and possible ties to an artistic world. Before the revolution - studying in professional ballet academies was a privilege of kids whose parents belonged to artistic circles, or had connections there. Due to a wonderful coincidence - Gorsky was an initiator of creating experimental professional training program in Bolshoi academy for talented grown up students. While he was teaching in above mentioned small school, he noticed Asaf's talent, and suggested him to

try himself in one of this experimental programs. Asaf was accepted and officially became a student of the academy. It was his first and last year of studying - as immediately after - he graduated and joined Bolshoi ballet group, where he was promoted to soloist

position swiftly, and after just a few years - to a principal dancer position. He was not tall or athletic, neither he had top lines (accordingly to his own confession).. but he had an impressive technical skills, pirouettes, high elevation, ballon and expressiveness. He was in a constant research of improvement and finding new accents in male ballet performance. At the same period of time as his dancer's career began, he also started to teach. First - at private ballet studios, and then at 1923 he was invited to teach ballet in Bolshoi ballet academy. Resuming all said above, we can conclude that career of Asaf Messerer was breathtaking. Starting doing ballet at 16yo. Making incredible progress, becoming a principle dancer of Bolshoi, also a teacher, and choreographer. He made a choreography in drama productions of famous Vsevolod Meirhold. I could have made this lecture only about Asaf - as he had incredibly fulfilled artistic life. The next figure to mention is - Asaf's sister, Sulamith Messerer also was a ballet dancer and teacher. She was also a principle of Bolshoi theater. She played an incredibly important role in lifeway of Maya Plisetskaya, niece of Asaf at Stalin's era.

Next figure I would like to mention is a sister of Asaf Messerer - Rahel. She was not a ballerina, but a professional actor of cinema - silent films. And she was a mother of Maya Plisetskaya, whose name is known by everyone, even people who have no relation to ballet. Rahel had very tough life. Her husband was arrested and then sentenced to a death penalty as so called "enemy of people" during a big terror/stalinist repressions. Rahel was arrested just some time after execution of her husband, and sent to one of the camps in Kazakhstan. Her daughter - Maya Plisetskaya was already a student of Bolshoi ballet academy at that time. She was in real risk of being sent to orphanage, as her parents went under repressions. Luckily, Sulamith Messerer who was a principle of Bolshoi too, has officially adopted Maya.

Maya Plisetskaya - legendary, outstanding figure. Not just because of being a top world star of ballet. But because of her entire life - was an example of resilience and resistance. Honestly, while learning her bio, I was not that impressed of her becoming a ballerina assoluta, but her incredible vitality and inner power to stand against hardship. As her parents were repressed, herself - had to go through toughest battles to have a right to go be allowed to go abroad, to create her own productions on Stage of Bolshoi. Her dancing career lasted for about 50 years - which is one of the longest ballet careers ever existed. She danced not only the classical repertory, which was not enough for her, but was also a creator of such productions as "Karmen suite", "Anna Karenina", - Music for these productions was written by her husband - Rodin Schedrin. An interesting fact about Karmen suite, which was choreographed by Alberto Alonso - is that while they had a discussions about their future production - Alberto's vision of Karmen's fate was a conflict of free spirit person against totalitariness, hypocrisy, double standard morality. Also Maya was one of the first Soviet ballet dancers who performed in productions of western choreographers, such as Roland Petit, Maurice Bejart.

Time of lecture is limited, so, I would like briefly to mention other names in this family who contributed to art - Alexander Plisetsky - brother of Maya, also a ballet dancer. Azariy Plisetsky - another brother of Maya, also a ballet dancer. Michail Messerer and Boris Messerer - sons of Asaf - Michail became a choreographer. Boris - an artist, stage designer.



