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Nikolai Demidov – Russian Theater’s Best-kept Secret

Andrei Malaev-Babel

ABSTRACT The article is dedicated to the creative heritage and biography of the outstanding Russian theater pedagogue – a student and closest colleague of Konstantin Stanislavski – director Nikolai Vasilievich Demidov (1884–1953). For the first time, in the English-speaking world, the article provides an introduction to the fundamental ideas behind Demidov’s teachings, and to his educational methods of actor cultivation, known as “The Demidov School.” Demidov is credited with developing an internal organic technique that demystifies inspiration and puts an actor in touch with his own creative process. Demidov’s discoveries in the realm of creativity attracted the attention of the leading Russian psychologists, physiologists and biologists, as they open a new chapter in the science of the creative process. In addition to the technique of authentic “living onstage,” Demidov also developed “the psycho-technique of the affective actor [tragedian],” which teaches the actor the art of navigating heightened emotional attitudes.

Keywords: creative psychology, actor’s internal organic technique, actor-tragedian, Nikolai Demidov’s School of Theater, history of twentieth-century Russian theater, Moscow Art Theater, Stanislavski, actor-training

Introduction

The legacy of Russian theater teacher, director and scholar Nikolai Demidov (1884–1953) compares with the groundbreaking revelations of men and women of science. The Demidov School of Theater brought forth the primacy of *creative perception* in the actor’s art. By doing so, it invited a new vision of theater – just as Galileo and Copernicus’ discovery of heliocentrism introduced a new view of the universe. For Galileo and Copernicus to proclaim that the sun does not revolve around the earth was a risky step. Demidov (2004: 262), who lived in the era of the “governmentalized” Stanislavski System, took serious risks when he challenged well-established beliefs by arguing that:

a different law of stage behavior has now developed and formulated itself: action does not constitute the primary cause of our emotional state; rather *our perception should be considered the primary cause, both of our action and of our emotional state.*

Just as Galileo had been forbidden from advocating heliocentrism, Demidov suffered serious consequences for his teachings on creative perception. In Stalinist Russia, Demidov, who disagreed with several aspects of the Stanislavski System, was persecuted and even forced into a self-imposed exile to Siberia. The monopoly, held by several influential Stanislavski disciples, prevented Demidov's complete heritage from surfacing for over half a century following Stalin's death.

It took Russia this long to discover one of its most important theater practitioners and theoreticians, as well as one of the three original teachers of the Stanislavski System. According to Meyerhold's witness (as quoted in Anechik 1992: 47), Stanislavski himself, at the time of his death, considered Demidov "his only student, who understands the System." The first head of the Moscow Art Theater's School, the first editor of *An Actor's Work* and the head of the Fourth Studio of MAT, Demidov was a key figure of twentieth-century Russian theater. Without his witness account, and without the awareness of his methods, one cannot fully comprehend the development of Stanislavski's views on actor training, or the creative methods of his students and collaborators, such as Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov and others.

Demidov's heritage contains innovative theory and practice. The Demidov School allows student-actors, *from the first day of their training*, to access the depths of their intuitive creativity. Demidov developed the Organic Acting Technique, its pedagogy and the directorial approach toward implementing it in rehearsal and performance practices. While fully subscribing to the Stanislavskian principles of truth, and to his School of Experiencing, Demidov avoided analytical and imperative tendencies inherent in the System, as well as its division of the creative process into separate elements. Contrary to the System, the Demidov School of Theater implements creative synthesis and the workings of the subconscious – *from the first moment of training and/or rehearsal and performance work*. Moreover, Demidov's work went beyond Stanislavskian "verisimilitude of feelings." It inspires "the truth of passions," always at the heart of the secrets of great tragedians, thus elevating the actor into heightened spheres of creativity.¹

Nikolai Demidov's Life and Heritage

In 1884, Nikolai Demidov was born in the town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the son of Vasily Demidov – a playwright, respected by Nikolai Ostrovsky, and an artistic director and founder of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk Popular Theater. From an early age, Nikolai was immersed in theater life.

As a child, Demidov suffered from debilitating illness that confined him to a wheelchair. The boy attempted suicide, yet, as a result of the mysterious coincidence (or perhaps the inevitability of fate), he emerged out of the ordeal completely unharmed. Demidov searched for a way out of his seemingly hopeless situation and developed his own set of gymnastic exercises, the regular use of which not only led to his recovery but, subsequently, to European records in weightlifting. Having successfully completed high school, Demidov enrolled in 1907 in the Moscow University's School of Medicine, where he concentrated on psychiatry.

Beginning in his early years, Demidov exhibited unorthodox thinking and organizational skills, as well as the ability to see things from an unusual perspective. At the age of twenty, Demidov established an Ivanovo-Voznesensk branch of the St Petersburg Athletic Society. There he developed and successfully applied his first program of individualized physical and spiritual training for athletes.

Friendship with Stanislavski's closest associate, Leopold Sulzerzhitsky, led to Demidov's introduction to Stanislavski in 1907. Their acquaintance developed into a close collaboration that lasted for more than thirty years.

After graduating from the university in 1913, Demidov started practicing at the Pletnyov Clinic in Moscow, specializing in psychiatry. He studied yoga and homeopathy. The legendary Russian doctor Pyotr Badmaev introduced Demidov to Tibetan medicine. It is Demidov who is responsible for the introduction of yoga principles to the teachings of Stanislavski.

Demidov was present at the birth, formation and development of the System. He assisted Stanislavski in gathering and organizing scientific data and analyzing the results of his experimentation and research. As early as 1911, Demidov supplied Stanislavski with detailed accounts of his own experiments that he conducted with his brother Konstantin, a noted actor. These original experiments in the application of yoga and other spiritual teachings to acting established the foundation of the Demidov School. They are featured in the fifth and final book of the Demidov heritage, dedicated to the so-called "higher aerobatics." Among other discoveries Demidov shared with Stanislavski in the early 1910s are the techniques of preserving freshness and spontaneity in the actor's speech and its internal imagery, as well as discoveries on the workings of the creative subconscious.

Stanislavski had grown to appreciate Demidov's many unique gifts: his knowledge – since childhood – of the theater world, his diverse yet fundamental education, his scientific and philosophical mind. Demidov's methodical thinking, as well as his bright and vivid imagination, coupled with his gifts for research and teaching, have proven quite useful to Stanislavski's experimentation. In 1911, Demidov began working with Stanislavski as his assistant, and in 1919, at the insistence of Stanislavski, he left the medical profession and devoted himself to the theater.

In 1926, Stanislavski gave the following reference to Demidov:

I have known Nikolai Demidov for 15 years. This is a selfless enthusiast, and a man full of genuine love and dedication to the art. From the time we met, he became so interested in theater and, in particular, the internal (psychological) acting technique, that he entirely devoted himself to art. All these years, he has been helping me develop this rich and complex aspect of the actor's work. At the moment, I think, he is one of the few who knows the "system" in theory and practice. He has spent four years in my studio as an opera director and teacher. For two years, he led the Moscow Art Theater School² (after Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov), cultivating actors and conducting classes in the "system." (Demidov 2009: 460)

Demidov was also one of the first three original teachers (next to Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov) of the Stanislavski system, trained and recognized by Stanislavski himself. The results Demidov achieved with the Moscow Art Theater students made Stanislavski (1999: 167) proclaim, "Our school, prepared by Demidov, must carry God in it."

The other head of the Moscow Art Theater, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, also expressed his views on the significance of Demidov and his teachings. In 1929, Nemirovich wrote:

Everything we have discovered at the Moscow Art Theater, has been broadly developed in Demidov's teachings. Besides, having used our observations and discoveries as his foundation, Demidov, nevertheless, did not restrict himself to mere development and improvement of what he received at the MAT; he has been constantly moving forward, and he still does, finding things new – things that will enrich the theater schools of the future and the very science and theory of the psychology of the creative process. (Demidov 2009: 462)

Moscow Kamerny Theater's artistic director Alexander Tairov referred to Demidov as a "rare teacher-pedagogue, capable of awakening love toward true art within the actor and teaching the actors genuine, virtuoso inner technique" (Demidov 2009: 461).

The Demidov legacy was clearly established in 1910, when he began his experiments in the heightened spheres of the actors' creativity. However, the foundation of the Demidov School, its basics, had to wait for over a decade. In 1922, while in his tenure as the head of the Moscow Art Theater School, Demidov developed a new type of stage études. By the early 1930s, along with his students, he had an opportunity to test the new technique with several groups of young actors. Stanislavski, when presented with the results of a two-month Demidov training course, asked Demidov to serve as an editor of his book, *An Actor's Work*.

Under Demidov's influence, Stanislavski significantly reworked his book, most notably adding the last chapter, "The Subconscious and the Actor's Creative

State.” However, failing health and other external circumstances interfered with Stanislavski’s rewrites. Growing impatient with Demidov’s perfectionism and high demands, Stanislavski completed his book with another editor. In the introduction to *An Actor’s Work*, Stanislavski wrote:

N.V. Demidov helped me tremendously both in implementing the “system” and in creating this book. He gave me valuable suggestions, materials, examples; he shared with me his opinions on the book and exposed my mistakes. (Stanislavski 1954: 8)

In the 1930s, Demidov began to put his own discoveries into writing. At the time of Demidov’s death in 1953, his literary heritage consisted of five unpublished books: *The Art of the Actor – Its Present and Future*; *Actor Types*; *The Art of Living Onstage*; *Creative Artistic Process Onstage*; and *The Psycho-technique of the Affective Actor* [Tragedian].

In addition to working on his five books, Demidov remained one of Moscow’s most popular acting teachers. Between the early 1920s and early 1940s, he served as a lead teacher and director at prominent institutions such as Bolshoi Theater Opera Studio, Stanislavski Opera Studio, Moscow Kamerny Theater and its school, Moscow Conservatory, Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater, Stanislavski Opera Theater, Maly Theater’s Shchepkin School and Glazynov Music School.

In 1941, Demidov combined two groups of his own students (from the Maly Theater School and Glazynov Music School) to stage a performance of Gorky’s play, *The Last Ones*. The triumphant premiere, promising the creation of a new theater company, took place on June 21, 1941 – one day before the Soviet Union entered the Second World War.

Despite the success of the Gorky play, and Stanislavski’s recognition of the Demidov School, Demidov’s fate in Soviet Russia was tragic, following Stanislavski’s death and the country’s entry into the Second World War. Stanislavski’s disciples, those in the positions of power, felt threatened by Demidov’s independence and his innovations, which seemingly contradicted the Stanislavski System. They used their authority to get Demidov fired from the numerous Moscow theaters and schools where he directed and taught, and they succeeded in erasing Demidov’s name from the history of Russian theater for over sixty years.

During the Second World War, Demidov evacuated from Moscow to the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic, where he became the artistic director of the National Finnish Theater. It is there that Demidov created his directorial masterpiece – *Nora*, based on Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. After a brief return to Moscow, from 1945 to 1946, Demidov once again was forced into exile to the north, to Sakhalin Island. Demidov’s health could not withstand the harsh conditions of the far north, and in 1948 he left Sakhalin for Buryat-Mongol Soviet

Republic, where he headed the National Buryat-Mongol Theater and its school, as well as the Buryat-Mongol School of Musical Theater.

Demidov's health continued to deteriorate, and in 1949 he was forced to return to Moscow. Bedridden, he continued to work on his manuscripts, while making futile attempts to publish at least one of his five books – *The Art of Living Onstage*. Nikolai Demidov died in Moscow on September 8, 1953, leaving it to his disciples, present and future, to publish his books and to carry forward his School.

Among Demidov's students and followers are some of the leading actors, teachers and scholars of the twentieth-century Russian theater, such as Nikolai Plotnikov (Vakhtangov Theater), Boris Livanov (Moscow Art Theater) and Maria Knebel (GITIS). The first abridged edition of Demidov's manual, *The Art of Living Onstage*, appeared in 1965, during the period of Khrushchev's "thaw." It was secretly edited by Demidov's assistant Vladimir Bogachov and introduced by Livanov and Knebel. The publication of the near-complete four-volume Demidov heritage, however, became possible only due to the efforts of Demidov's close student, and one of St Petersburg's leading actors, Oleg Okulevich, and his wife – noted St Petersburg scholar Dr Margarita Laskina. The publication of Nikolai Demidov's heritage, edited by Laskina, took place in St Petersburg between 2004 and 2009. With this publication, the theatrical community in Russia has become aware of Demidov's crucial contribution to the art of theater and of the groundbreaking nature of his School.

The Demidov Literary Heritage

Demidov had a gift for presenting complex issues in a simple manner. An impeccable sense of composition helped Demidov to balance theory and practice. Demidov's simplicity of presentation never resulted in simplification of the subjects he explored, making his works equally interesting for scholars, experienced theater practitioners and beginner students. Finally, since Demidov's writings deal with the very laws of creativity, they are of interest to readers from various creative fields, such as psychology, sports, music, literature etc.

The first volume in the series of Demidov's five books is titled *The Art of the Actor: Its Present and Future*. This book outlines the guiding principles of the Demidov School, while setting it against the backdrop of contemporary theater practices of the period. In the first part of the book, Demidov analyzes the current state of theatrical art, including those tendencies that block the path for the theater of the future, such as falsification of artistic truth and dilettantism of the director and actor, especially when it comes to their knowledge of the subconscious creative process. *The Art of the Actor* provides a *practical* explanation of terms, such as theatrical truth, "organic creative nature," naturalism

and “experiencing.” These terms, often featured in Stanislavski’s teachings, are significantly clarified under Demidov’s pen.

The book draws parallels between the art of theater and other art forms, such as literature, music, sculpture etc. Demidov outlines both differences and similarities between the creative processes of the actor and those of a visual artist, writer or musician. The book also addresses the issue of a higher mission of theatrical art, outlining the ideals of artistic perfection as they have manifested throughout the history of theater and other arts. Among these ideals, Demidov singles out truth, beauty and a desire to achieve a profound, life-changing experience for one’s contemporaries. Such are the forces that, according to Demidov, initially bring all artists to the theater.

Demidov concludes his first book with the discussion of “cognitive automatism.” He describes the mechanism of automatism in everyday life, science and technology, as well as in creativity. Thus, Demidov lays the foundation for his school of actor training, which utilizes cognitive automatism for the transforming of an actor’s everyday (mundane) reflexes into *creative* reflexes.

Demidov’s second book is titled *Actor Types*. For the first time in the history of theatrical thought, Demidov identifies and discusses four predominant types of actors:

1. Imitator
2. Emotional (or Emotionally willful)
3. Affective (Tragedian)
4. Rationalist

Demidov’s book reveals how the existence of these actor types led to the formation of four prevailing trends in the performing arts and the associated pedagogy. Demidov makes a detailed analysis of the creative process and of the qualities ingrained in each of the four types. At the same time, Demidov demonstrates the advantages of the Passionate (or Affective) Actor over other types. Moreover, Demidov argues that a precise technique exists behind the intuitive, subconscious process of a tragedian, and that it can be developed through specific training. This statement is especially important, as it challenges the commonly accepted notion that the internal psychological mechanism of a tragedian (“trust your gut” kind of actor) is unreliable and dependent on the whims of inspiration. Truly revolutionary is Demidov’s discovery that the subconscious technique of an actor-tragedian is accessible, to some degree, to all actors who possess the basic qualities inherent in this creative type and who are willing to work hard to further develop these qualities.

Demidov’s classification goes far beyond the sphere of theatrical art and is valuable for members of any creative profession, as well as for all those interested in creative psychology. As for people of theater, *Actor Types* is an indispensable

aid for actors in choosing a school harmonious with their unique creative type, and/or in choosing their personalized path in independent training.

The third book of the heritage, *The Art of Living Onstage*, is the most practical of the five Demidov books. It is a detailed manual for the first year of training in the Demidov School. The book outlines the first-year's acting curriculum, while carefully guiding the teacher through the labyrinth of the training process. *The Art of Living Onstage* outlines the trajectory of Demidov's "étude technique" as it develops throughout the first year of training: from simple text études facilitating students' first, spontaneous impulses to the elaborate études featuring fixed, given circumstances. The latter create a bridge to Demidov's scene study approach. The book also features individual exercises and "scales" aimed at developing specific qualities such as creative freedom, the feeling of truth, sensory and kinetic responsiveness and acute receptivity.

The Art of Living Onstage features unique insights into the field of creative psychology and offers a description of the subconscious creative process, including the hidden mechanisms. An abridged version of this book appeared in 1965 at the insistence of noted Soviet scientists – psychologists and physiologists – a half-century ahead of the release of Demidov's complete heritage.

Demidov's book *Creative Artistic Process Onstage*, fourth in the series, is dedicated to the organic character facilitation techniques. It introduces and explores an original aspect of the Demidov School, such as the "embryo" of the role and its organic development. The book deals with the process of creative transformation and with the formation of the character, as well as with the dialectical relationship between the character and the actor. *Creative Artistic Process Onstage* provides a practical explanation of the duality of the actor's life onstage, thus demystifying the "paradox of an actor."

Of special interest in the book are the chapters such as "Actor and Author" and "Actor and Director." A large part of Demidov's study focuses on the philosophical and theoretical aspects of the actor's creativity. At the same time, the book also addresses issues of the actor's virtuosity. It speaks of Synthesis and the Arc of the Character and the Play, positioning the actor's creativity and the formation of character as a complex yet *indivisible* organic process.

Demidov's fifth and final book is *The Psycho-technique of the Affective [Passionate] Actor [Tragedian]*. It is dedicated to the Demidov technique of "higher aerobatics" and focuses on the theater of heightened emotions, characteristic of the great master thespians, such as Pavel Mochalov, Eleonora Duse, Tommaso Salvini, Maria Ermolova, Vera Komissarzhevskaya and Sandro Moissi.

This in-depth discussion of the art of the tragedian introduces, for the first time in acting scholarship, *principles and techniques making up the creative process of the passionate actor*. In its introductory part, the book examines the phenomenon of creative "play" – in life and in theater. In addition to that, the first part of the book describes the specific type of creative research or study (of the text and

the role) defined by Demidov as “emotional synthesis.” *The Psycho-technique* also reveals the importance of primitive biological sensations in the art of a tragedian – a physiological basis for heightened emotions. The book describes in detail the phenomenon of psychological and cognitive “split,” typical of the creative process of every experiencing actor and of the passionate actor (tragedian) in particular.

In the book, Demidov examines the prerequisites for entering the highest spheres of creativity, including cultures of calm and passivity as well as the techniques of “subconscious perception” and “psychic breath.” *The Psycho-technique of the Affective Actor* concludes with an unprecedented study of the creative relationship between the actor and the audience.

The Demidov School of Theater

Most existing training methods focus on the material of the play and on communicating to the actors ideas behind the character and the play, while teaching them how to play a particular role. In contrast to these methods, the Demidov School chooses *the actors and their creative instrument* as its main focus. Methodical refinement of the actor’s internal instrument and the facilitation of the subconscious flow of the actor’s creativity result, in the Demidov School, in the *organic creation of the play and the role*. Demidov’s method of revealing and developing talent is based on individual approaches to actors. Instead of interfering with actors’ processes, Demidov concentrates on the skillful removal of all obstacles that impede a sound flow to their creativity. Once the solid creative state has been restored, the role and the scene take care of themselves.

The main goal of the Demidov School lies in the cultivation of actors who possess one of the paramount professional qualities – that of *creative freedom*. This quality is essential to the harmonious implementation of the actor’s intuitive creative desires. When developed, the quality of creative freedom allows the actors to unquestioningly obey their own spontaneous impulses, while freely reacting to the given circumstances of the play, their partners’ behavior etc.

Demidov’s freedom leads to creative improvisation within the framework of the play’s circumstances and the author’s/director’s concept. This improvisation does not suffer from the strict framework of the given circumstances of the role. Neither is it impeded by the production framework such as blockings, a particular set, lighting design and so on.

The Demidov School offers the following means for the development of the actor’s creative freedom:

1. Specially designed text études, utilized both in training and rehearsals;
2. A series of psychophysical exercises, both for classroom work and for homework; and
3. The actors’ scales, intended for a daily workout at home.

The introduction of daily psychological scales is a pioneering achievement. His scales differ from the psychological exercises currently practiced in theater schools. While the latter are grounded in emotional memory, or sensory recall, Demidov's scales are dedicated to fostering the actors' ability to recognize and facilitate their first, spontaneous creative reactions.

The other focus of the Demidov scales, as well as his text études, lies in the development of the actor's creative perception. Demidov's pioneering exercises stimulate and train for the stage the very mechanism of imaginative perception – the actor's creative "inhale."

The Demidov Etudes seem to be the complete opposite of the Stanislavski-type étude. In the Stanislavski-based improvisational exercise, the given circumstances (time, place, relationships between partners) are given, and so are the tasks. Based on those, the actor proceeds to improvise the text of the étude. In a Demidov étude, a simple text is given to the actors, and nothing more. This text is designed in such a way that it is open to interpretation. It provides *some* of the given circumstances, but does not firmly dictate characters, relationships, place or time. The text is never discussed, but simply repeated several times by the actors. The instructor then asks partners to forget the text, to "toss it out of their heads," and to remain empty for two to three seconds. The first impulse following the period of emptiness (be it thought, movement, sensation or mood) is obeyed by the actors – they passively surrender to it and continue to do so for the duration of the étude. What follows is a spontaneous improvisation of the circumstances (relationships, time, space, facts etc.) embodied by the actors in the course of the étude.

The actors' ability to imaginatively perceive the circumstances, the partner and the environment is cultivated in the Demidov études. Since the actual surroundings and the partner become the chief source for the actor's imagination, the Demidov études – like no other exercises – open up the actors' perceptive channels and develop their reflex of creative perception. Active behavior and emotional life occur in Demidov's études just as they do in life – as *reactions* to the perceived circumstances. In addition to Demidov's discoveries on the primacy of perception over action, his études also feature the signature "cultures" of the Demidov School, which include "emptiness" and "passivity."

Demidov's discoveries in the realm of character development and facilitation are equally original, if not revolutionary. As the only professionally trained psychologist among the masters of Russian theater, he collected extensive data on character development – both through his own research and by studying significant actors of the School of Experiencing and their creative methods. Demidov's research and his data prove that actors form their characters immediately upon their first acquaintance with the part. Moreover, Demidov has proved that the actor's subconscious, intuitive perception of the role is always true to its original source, as well as to the actor's true creative individuality. Therefore,

this first intuitive perception of the role inevitably continues to live in the actor. The role's impulses (thoughts, feelings, desires and actions) thus arise within the actor immediately following the act of creative "inception." Even in those cases when the directors, or the actors themselves, adopt an analytically formed concept that contradicts the intuitively formed "embryo" of the role, such a concept comes into inevitable conflict with the actor's intuitive process.

Actors might mobilize all their willpower in order to implement the intellectual concept. In this case, however, the subconscious impulses, triggered by the creative instinct, would continue developing in parallel with the forcefully introduced concept. These spontaneous impulses appear, seemingly unnoticeable, during rehearsals and performances in the form of parallel internal and external currents, conflicting with those actions, psychologies and desires imposed (or self-imposed) upon the actor. As a result, the audience perceives a psychophysical split in the actor; this split is greatly enlarged by the magnifying lens of the stage. The inevitable presence of the intuitive process in the actor's life onstage, if ignored by the actor and director, leads the audience to the conclusion that the actor is not fully truthful and/or lacks self-confidence.

The Demidov School of Theater rejects an intellectually designed predetermined pattern of the role, as it cannot be successfully imposed upon the objectively existing creative life of the actor. Instead, the Demidov organic technique ensures conditions under which the psychological pattern of the role *coincides* with the free creative life of the actor. Such a tactic, in the Demidov School, causes the imaginary life of the character to absorb the actual life of the actor (and vice versa), thus leading to genuine creative transformation.

In addition to this, the Demidov teachings and rehearsal practices contain several effective methods of organic character facilitation. Among those, the technique of "accumulating the character" is of most interest. Also of note are Demidov's methods of absorbing the character through subtle psychological currents and receiving the character's individual qualities via "psychic breath."

The development of character relationships, in Demidov's practices, is an equally organic process. It includes methods of subconscious perception, as well as techniques of perceiving the partner's essence (accomplished through physical contact and special breath techniques).

Pioneering rehearsal techniques introduced by Demidov include the *étude* work on the past of the play (that is, character and relationships formed prior to the start of the play). It supplies preparation for the actor's life in the role, including all of its emotional climaxes. Rehearsing the *physiological* life of the character, as a means of discovering the truth of a given scene, is yet another device unique to Demidov. Also of great interest among Demidov rehearsal techniques is his practice of introducing "outside" texts into the rehearsal process. Drawn from other works by the play's author, or from other corresponding materials, these texts give the director and actor the means to cultivate the characters while

keeping the text of the play fresh and spontaneous for the actor. Needless to say, all of these rehearsal practices are deeply connected with Demidov's internal technique of the actor-improviser.

Among the most significant innovations of the Demidov School are the methods of facilitating heightened creative emotions. Demidov's technique of "psychic breath," for example, is indispensable for work on Shakespeare and other classics. This method is integrally linked with Demidov's technique of subconscious (non-analytical) perception. These subconscious perceptive means allow the creative impression, received from the stage environment (given circumstances of the play, text, partner) to travel into the deepest layers of the actor's psyche. The method of psychic breath was created by Demidov based on the "guild secrets" of the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century tragedians.

Conclusion

Nikolai Demidov's legacy – Russian theater's best-kept secret – is swiftly spreading and influencing the theater world. In Russia today, the Demidov School is researched at some of its top-five theatrical schools such as the St Petersburg State Academy of Theater Arts and the Russian University of Theater Arts (GITIS/RATI) in Moscow. One of the foremost Russian teachers of acting, Veniamin Filshinsky³ (2006: 139), refers to the Demidov School as "pedagogy of the future."

In the US, at Florida State University's Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training (one of America's top-ten graduate schools for actors and one of the top twenty-five in the English-speaking world⁴), Demidov's methods have been utilized extensively since 2009. Several theater schools and institutions in the US, Canada and Europe have been introduced to the FSU/Asolo Conservatory's work with the Demidov technique. In the last five years, the Conservatory's experience has been shared with observers and visitors from institutions such as Peter Brook's CICT/Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord and the University of Windsor's School of Dramatic Art (Ontario, Canada). Lectures and workshops in the Demidov Technique have been presented by the author of this article at forums and institutions, including ATHE, Stanford University, the Lee Strasberg Institute (New York), Rose Bruford College (UK) and the Stanislavski Institute (Sao Paulo, Brazil.)

The experience of the FSU/Asolo Demidov-based training also inspired interest in Russia. Extensive master classes in the Demidov technique have been presented by the author at the St Petersburg State Academy of Theater Arts. An English-language collection of the Demidov heritage titled *Becoming an Actor-Creator* will be published by Routledge in August 2015; a similar Russian edition is in the works.

About one hundred years after Stanislavski's innovations began to bridge Russian and Western theater, the legacy of his close collaborator and successor Nikolai Demidov also begins to transcend cultural barriers. Due to its immense creative potential, it promises to foster international dialog and exchange between theater scholars, teachers, students and practitioners.

Andrei Malaev-Babel is Associate Professor of Theater and Head of Acting at Florida State University/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training. His major publications include *The Vakhtangov Sourcebook* (Routledge, 2011) and *Yevgeny Vakhtangov*, the first English-language study of the Russian theatrical innovator (Routledge, 2012). He is currently co-editing and translating a collection of Nikolai Demidov's heritage for Routledge.

Notes

1. Both Demidov and Stanislavski quoted Alexander Pushkin's well-known aphorism from his 1930 unfinished article on drama: "The truth of passion, a verisimilitude of the feelings experienced in supposed circumstances – that is what our intelligence demands of a dramatic artist." Demidov in his writings argues that the Stanislavski System never produced the "truth of passions" characteristic of the art of the nineteenth- to early twentieth-century tragic actors, whose subconscious technique inspired Demidov's discoveries.
2. Although the Moscow Art Theater School, headed by Demidov, was not organized until 1922, Stanislavski is referring to the First Studio of MAT (led subsequently by Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov) as the Moscow Art Theater School.
3. Stanislavski Award Laureate, Chair of the Department of Acting and Professor of the St Petersburg State Academy of Theater Arts.
4. According to the *New York Times*, *US World & News Report* and *Hollywood Reporter*.

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