

LIFE AND ART LESSONS OF REGIMANTAS ADOMAITIS

In 2012 theater and cinema actor Regimantas Adomaitis turned 75. He played numerous catchy characters in Soviet, Russian, and Lithuanian movies. The blockbuster *Nobody Wants to Die* by director Vytautas Zalakiavicius in which Adomaitis appeared as Donatas, the youngest of the Lokis brothers who decided to revenge their father, opened a new galaxy of talented Lithuanian actors, such as Juozas Budraitis, Donatas Banionis, Laimonas Noreika who enjoyed nationwide fame after it.

In Lithuania Adomaitis is considered the luminary of the national theater. His role of King Mindaugas in the play by Justinas Marcinkevicius joined the Golden Fund of Lithuanian Theater. It is symbolic that this year on the Day of the State timed to the crowning of the only Lithuanian King and celebrated as a main national holiday Regimantas Adomaitis was awarded the Grand Cross of Commander for Merits to Lithuania. .

It was his second high award. In 1997 the actor was decorated with the Gediminas Order third degree. The facade side covers the other side of his life where there is no applause, no ovations, congratulatory speeches and where he remains alone with himself. There is little light in that private life, alas.

Adomaitis was not feeling well and we agreed to meet in his home. I rang the bell, the door opened, and a hairy gray-brown boll rolled

out to my feet. The master followed the dog in a gown.

– It's Duka, my loyal dog, Regimantas said pointing at the hairy ball. – Come in and I'll clean it all after it.

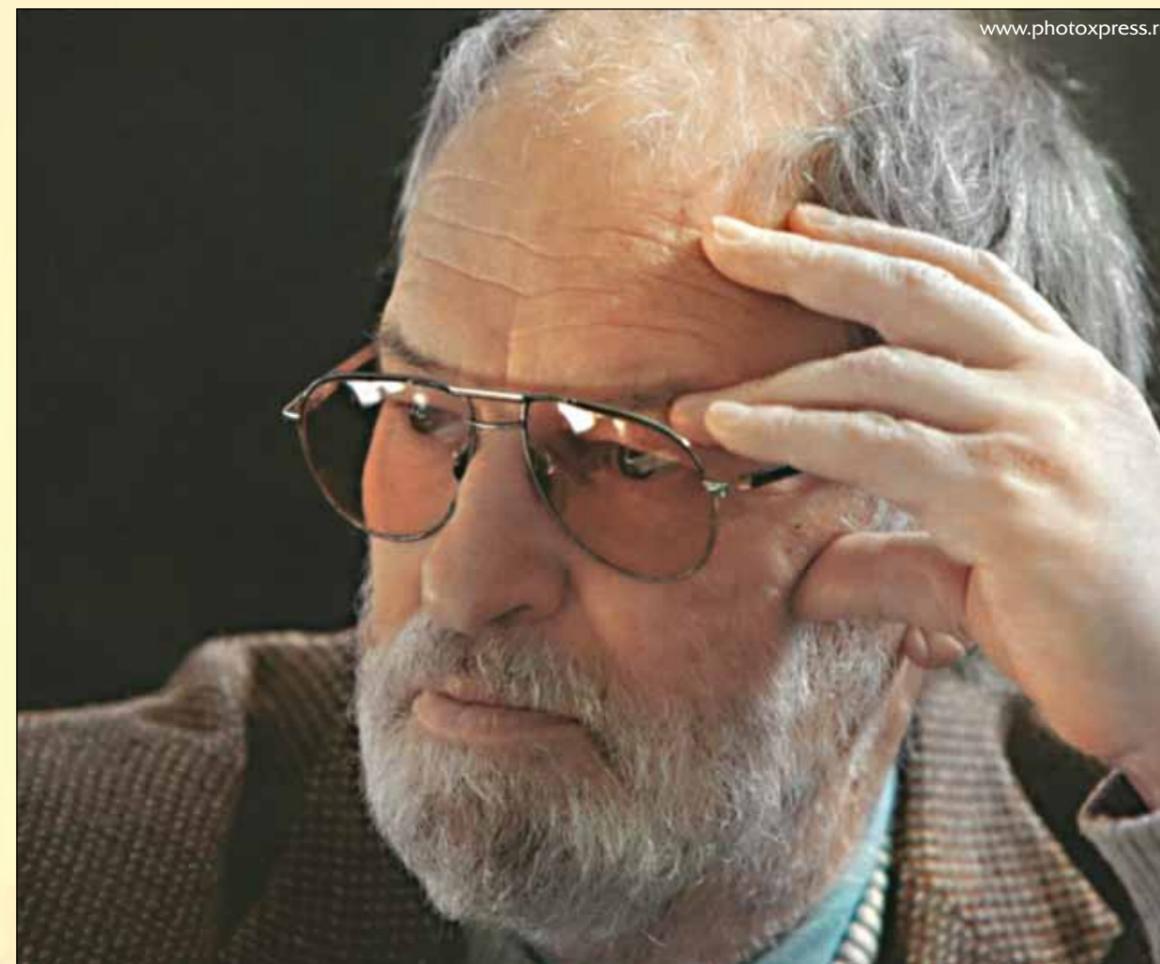
I attempted to help maestro in the cleanup, but he replied with resolute "Never" and disappeared with a scoop and a plastic bag leaving me alone to view his apartment. I knew his wife died a year ago. They lived together for over 42 years. I could not imagine how lonely an apartment may look without a mistress. Everything around was telling me there is no woman to keep the fireside. From the coffee table in the guest room a portrait of Eugenija sadly looked at the mess around, at a heap of dusty photos in a corner behind the sofa.

The owner soon came back with his hairy friend, apologized for the cold in the room and tried to switch on the heater. I had to help him plug it into the socket. After a short debate who the heater should target we agreed it should be Duka that stretched out on the floor close to the heat.

– I have just arrive from Visaginas where I went only to catch cold, Adomaitis said. – A festival of one-actor plays was held there for the seventh time and I was invited to the jury for the second time. It was very cold in the auditorium. Colder than here. You can see the result.

---- But you could refuse...

How can I? I enjoy one-actor plays. If actors agree to such an undertaking it means they have chosen their lines. They play what they like and treasure. I have never staged one-actor performances and usually participated in dialogues, but I clearly realize how much



strength and will an actor has to spend and open his soul. It is immediately clear what each actor is and what is important for him. It is very dangerous and difficult to open yourself.

But this is the task of an actor. You chose the profession yourself, didn't you?

Initially I chose a different profession. I studied at the physical-mathematical faculty in the Vilnius University, but after the fourth year I realized it was not my path. I entered the Conservatoire to study for an actor. However I graduated from the university and received a diploma in physics. Moreover, I believe I remained a physicist in playing my roles. I was always interested in understanding the character rather than in the end result. Playing a role offers an instrument to research the soul of a character. The psychological analysis helps display the character and stress its specifics. You may not believe, but the

end result is of no interest. The process of investigating a human soul is important.

However spectators assess the end result and often praise it. Are you pleased with attention of your admirers on the whole post-Soviet space?

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I was a darling of fortune and I have to pay for it now. I am satisfied with my life although I believe the high praise to me was unfair. I am not talented, I am laborious.

Who told you that?

I believe it myself. I always worked hard and if I succeeded to do something special in movies it is because I was guided by such talented directors as Zalakiavicius, Kozintsev, Griakia-

vicious. Spectators assess the result which does not often depend on the input. And it is very difficult to understand the mechanism of success. Why does a movie or an actor become quickly popular while others do not enjoy the fame they deserve? When I am told they love me in Russia I

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can hardly understand the reasons of the popularity. I have never enjoyed a "Wow" fame. Besides, I always preferred theater and despite numerous movies I never missed a season in the theater. I can understand how Oleg Strizhenov became a star after the Gadfly movie, but my characters were no so bright and I enjoyed awareness (to say nothing of fame) with time.

You played foreigners, western intellectuals and spies in many Soviet movies. Was your appearance which did not look Soviet the only reason?

I don't know why they offered me to play Americans. Frankly speaking, I knew nothing about them although I like American literature and read a lot of it. Irwin Shaw is my beloved writer. Well, I could have unintentionally borrowed some American traits. But truly speaking we, Lithuanian actors, were no foreigners. We were strained and wimp like everyone, like the whole society. My interest in American literature could have affected my conduct, but not appearance. This is the whole of the secret.

Do you maintain friendly relations with Russian actors?

In general movies bring people together for a short time and then they depart and you never know whether you meet again. After the Exploded Trust movie I made friends with Karachentsev. I visited him after the horrible tragedy. But it is difficult to communicate with him today without a translator - his wife. I still maintain warm relations with Vyacheslav Vinnik, an actor and director from Kiev film studio. I

played in his Exciting Victory Moment movie. He currently lives in Canada and dreams of shooting a movie with me. He sent me the script. But we both clearly realize it is much more difficult to find a sponsor for the movie in Canada than on our continent.

Do they recognize you today on stage in Lithuania, Moscow, St. Petersburg?

In Moscow they recognize me in company with Banionis. I



am joking. They used to recognize me and asked for autographs. Now as I've got a beard they stopped recognizing me even in Vilnius. I do not suffer from that. I do not want to shave off the beard because I hope to appear with it in a new movie to which I have been invited. Don't ask which movie. I keep my fingers crossed. The role is very interesting although small.

I saw you as Casanova in Domino Theater and I again was convinced in high professional skills of the old guard of actors. Thank God, such high-level actors are not engaged in the endless performance chain of our time, aren't they?

I do not like this performance and my play in it. I prefer the Seagull in the Baltic House of St. Petersburg where I appear as Dron. Although it is painstaking in my age to monthly travel by train to St. Petersburg to play the character, but I always enjoy going to the stage and the response of the auditorium. I believe Russian spectators are extremely sensitive and responsive and you may hear the auditorium breathe with support to you. It adds strength. I shiver every time I go on stage. Temperature

rises and heart beats. But it is the state of mind which helps me play. I am likely to remain a romanticist forever as I am ill with the outdated disease.

I treasure the Last Months play staged in the Maly Theater in Vilnius by Rimas Tuminas who currently directs the Vakhtangov Theater. It has been performed with success in the Lithuanian capital



for five years. It is a play by Italian playwright Furio Bordona where I star as the Father who is sent by his son to a

care home. The play is about understanding between generations. It says life is a miracle and there are forces that support and feed a human soul. Frankly speaking it is a play about me. Sometimes I want to go on stage and speak on my own behalf, however I realize it is impossible not to play on stage. Theater demands comprehension of the image, it demands to shift reality and look at it from aside. Every time I go on stage I am very nervous that I may forget the words or do something wrong. But then I abide by the saying: A soldier can march as long as he can. And then he marches as long as it is necessary. I like it in my profession that it has no claims for eternity. Today you may be inspired and your play makes spectators breathless. That may never happen again although the play continues to be performed. But this inspiration

is what you live and work for. Unfortunately, the death of my wife put out the fire in me and I still hope it might reignite one day. It may sound too pessimistic... But I clearly realize that life is running like water. It is the rule.

Which directors are close to your soul?

My beloved director and teacher is Henrikas Vanckiavicius who quit the theater likely for health reasons or maybe other ones. He was a true director for actors as he analyzed each character to the bones. Today his school is no longer fashionable. But for me the school of a realistic and psychological theater, the school of the Moscow Art Theater remains in force.

Well, I naturally recognize the talent of modern directors, for example, Oskaras Korčunovas, but I am different. Among film directors,

besides Zakakiavicius, I can praise Grigory Kozintsev. I remember that while shooting King Lear he explained to me the character of bastard Edmond who became an evil man due to circumstances. The director said that kindred was typical for the epoch of Renaissance and challenged both the skies and authorities to prove his right to be the ruler of human destinies. Kozintsev was planning a new film and wanted me to play in it, but unfortunately he died a sudden death.

Among modern theater directors Rimas Tuminas is close to me. He currently directs the Vakhtangov Theater in Moscow. Although he is accused of ignoring traditions, I saw a play with Vakhtangov old-timers and it was exciting. There is nothing I can say about Lithuanian cinema. When I was coming back from Visaginas

I drove by the former film studio. There are only ruins left. Which traditions and new schools can we talk about?

Do you have beloved roles?

Mostly theater roles. Once I used to live in incredible tension: I played in the theater every season and was constantly filmed in movies. Today there are not so many roles where I could say something important. Naturally, they are Donatas in Zalakiavicius' film and King Mindaugas... I believe the most important for me was the role of Frantz in Sartre's

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Condemned of Altona staged by Vancevicius in Vilnius Theater. Only playing the role I began to understand it. I was completely exhausted by the work and could not allow myself to relax.

That is why you decided to write a book about artistic skill, didn't you?

My friends provoked me to write the book. I kept a diary for a long time, looked through it and decided to publish some of the stories. I thought young actors may benefit from my experience. Thus, the book called Backstage Notes appeared. It does not seem to cause major interest. It is not memoirs. I never read memoirs of actors as I dislike them. An actor is an egoist and lives on stage for show. It is normal for actors otherwise they would not choose the profession. However I believe it to be abnormal to describe the egoism in memoirs. I have begun to doubt of late what I wrote and considered in long years. Should an actor work up to exhaustion, burn and excite the spectator when today it is enough to run naked on stage to become famous? I stopped writing the diary after my wife died.

You brought up three sons with your wife. Has any of them followed professional suit of the parents? Your wife was also an actress, wasn't she?

They are all grownup people and everyone traverses his own path. The senior son, Vytautas, studied in the United States and graduated from the University in Chicago. I had no money to pay for his education. Thank God, a friend of mine in America provided a guarantee and my son could take a credit. After graduation he worked at a stock exchange and repaid the loan.

I was on a tour in Canada and visited a stock exchange. It is a nightmare for everyone boiling in that hell. I am very glad that Vytautas and his family of four children returned to Lithuania. He currently works in a foreign company. They live close to me and we often visit each other. My middle son, Gediminas, graduated from a theater school but did not make a big career. He currently lives in England and sometimes plays small cinema roles with Russian and Belarussian film producers. He mostly makes a living by doing everything which pays like most Lithuanian young people do when they go abroad in search of happiness. Younger son Mindaugas lives with me. He is a very

nice guy and we properly get along. He deals with car servicing. He is very busy and comes home late at night. After Eugenija died I am the cook in the house and learn how to cook at my age. When my known and unknown admirers, mostly women, learned about it they began to send me numerous cooking recipes. So now I am taking cooking lessons.

I know you spend a lot of time in your countryside estate in Molet district. Does it help you abandon sorrowful thoughts?

Previously I did a lot of earth work. I grew up apple trees, bred bees, worked as a carpenter. Now I go there for rest and do nothing. My younger son does most of the work.

Do you remember you used to be fond of politics?

I never was. I never had any political ambitions however life sometimes makes you involved in the developments. When the perestroika policy began in the USSR Lithuania did not yet feel the wind of change. I was elected and agreed to join the team of Sajudis. We were all elected to the USSR Supreme Soviet where we tried to make Gorbachev and all lawmakers understand the necessity to change existing order and ensure freedom of speech. It was the last congress in the country which soon disintegrated. When election to the Lithuanian parliament was held later I said I will not run. Why?

I am an ordinary citizen and I deeply believe those who want to govern the country

should at least know one sphere of activities and make reasonable proposals. To build is not to ruin. Intellect is not sufficient for it. I can say what is wrong but I cannot offer a solution.

However our actors and showmen who are less gifted than you were triumphantly elected to parliament...

And then failed completely. When artistic people go to parliament I understand what ambitions they have. But I believe other people are necessary to fit into the system and generate ideas. It is because such people want to be in power for selfish interests and are absolutely convinced they can and have the right to govern the country that the very notion of

politics and politicians has devalued. A politician is a profession which demands knowledge and eloquence, as well as a set of moral values.

You lived a beautiful artistic life, brought up children, and now grandchildren are growing. Isn't it a reason for satisfaction?

Today I believe Eugenija was the best in my life. Earlier I thought the theater meant everything for me and was the essence and justification of my life. I was ready to sacrifice anything for it. Now I understand how unfair and inattentive I was to the closest kin.

Several years ago I received the Silver Crane prize for successful cinema career and brought the bird home to boast before my wife. She looked at me and said: "It is not you who received it. It's we who received." She was hundred percent right. Everything I achieved and did in my life was due to her. I realized it



late and I am ashamed of my egoism and vanity. Although I never liked praise. Do you see the photos in the corner? I never collected them. People gave them to me. Naturally, it was sometimes pleasant to look at them, but they are the pages of the past that have been closed. I never live with the past. As for happiness with children, it is mostly attributable to women. They know how to dissolve themselves in other people. I can't do it...

... At his sad moment a miracle occurred: a butterfly flew into the room through a slightly opened window. A big violet butterfly was an unexpected message from the long-gone summer. We watched it and argued whether it is better for it in the outside rain or in the room. The butterfly decided it itself. It dried and warmed up and flew away.

Regimantas Adomaitis smiled and said: "Since childhood we know that we are mortal. Does it means there is no life and we shall hurry to die? While birds sing and butterflies fly into your home you have to

enjoy it all rather than think about age and accompanying diseases. Am I right?"

Rules for actors (and not only) designed by Regimantas Adomaitis:

1. Learn to enjoy every detail.
2. Do not ignore developments of concern for others.
- 3 Always honestly voice your opinion and do not keep it to yourself.
4. Do not pose to be smarter and better informed than you are.
5. Exit with a smile from most difficult situations.
6. Never talk behind one's back if you cannot say it directly to the person.

Galina Afanasyeva,
for Amber Bridge