

Soviet Consul

Kate: Do you also have a lot of people who come to the consulate to talk to you?

Vladimir: Some American scientists call us, they'd like to know our vision of some programs, how we assess some meeting between politicians... for example, a year ago when Mr. Gorbachev spoke in Vladivostok about Soviet proposals toward Asian countries, they wanted to know our assessment: What does it mean? Maybe we have some more information, we could explain to them this point, and this point, and so on.

We invite them, they invite us, we have a lot of meetings. Sometimes we invite them for lunch, or for some conferences, it depends.

Kate: So it's mainly scientists?

Vladimir: Yes, here in San Francisco it's mainly scientists, because you know it's not Washington, D.C., and when in Washington D.C. you could talk with policy makers and people who are involved directly... but in San Francisco, yes, the main public we're talking with is scientists.

Kate: When there is some kind of international incident, for example, Chernobyl, or recently the spy incident with the U.S. Marines, do you get a lot of people calling up to complain?

Vladimir: Yes.

Kate: Do you have to answer those calls, too, or do secretaries do that?

Vladimir: It depends. We have telephone operators, some people are calling and they don't want to have answers, they just like to explain to us their view, sometimes they don't need answer. If people like to have some answer or some explanation, they call us and leave their address and formulate the question and we try to answer, to send some letters.

Kate: Do people ever call you to tell you they like something the Soviet Union is doing?

Vladimir: Oh, a lot of people are calling, actually, after every speech or initiative put forth by Gorbachev, a lot of people are calling just to say that they are supporting this idea, that we are standing and fighting for peace, it's true. Some people say that we don't believe you, it's propaganda, and so on—different calls.

Kate: How would you say the phone calls and letters run, positive compared to negative?

Vladimir: You know, now we have more positive letters and calls, during the last two years, and people say that they support this idea just declared by Gorbachev, and particularly in the field of disarmament.

Kate: So this has happened especially since the beginning of the Soviet moratorium on nuclear weapons testing?

Vladimir: Yes, especially after the moratorium, a lot of people called us to express their support for the moratorium, they asked us to continue it, and [they said] "we will try to say to our administration that they will have to follow you." A lot of calls.

Kate: What do you think that American people already understand best about the Soviet Union?

Vladimir: It's difficult to be a judge, but unfortunately my understanding is that [American] people know not too much about us.

Kate: What particular things do you wish they knew more about?

Vladimir: Just the truth about our life, because especially when we go to some rural area, far from San Francisco, they sometimes are really surprised that we look like human beings, and it shows that they actually know nothing about us. They try to judge our policy and so on, but they don't even know, they thought that we look like animals.

Kate: If there was just one thing that you could explain to Americans, one thing you really want them to know about the Soviet Union, what would it be?

Vladimir: I suppose it should be possible to have more information about our life, about our people, what we are, maybe even what we are doing during the holidays, how we are living, very simple things, our everyday life, about our policy, about what is the policy's aim. Just truth, because, maybe it's not pleasant for American people [to hear], but I can say that our ordinary people know much more about the United States than ordinary American people know about Soviet people.

Kate: Where do Soviet people learn about Americans?

Vladimir: For example, from books, because a lot of books of American writers have been published in the Soviet Union, and every school boy and school girl know the names of Jack London, Mark Twain, and the names of at least 10 or 15 American writers.

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Kate: So you think they learn a lot by reading novels.

Vladimir: Yes, and they know about your history, your revolution, your pattern of life, your problems, and not only from newspapers, it's impossible you know [to learn everything that way] but it's a good way too.

Kate: And from movies?

Vladimir: From movies, yes, but it's impossible to know something positive about our life if you see such a mini-series as "Amerika." It's not maybe dangerous for us, I suppose, but it's dangerous for people here because it's a misconception, people don't know truth... It would be better if they knew nothing!

I just mentioned about this meeting of filmmakers. I suppose it will help maybe if everybody will decide to make just fair films. It will help because television and movies are a forceful thing, one of the big sources of education.

I can't say that all Soviet films about America absolutely reflect the real situation here. Yes, we are involved in stereotypes, too, and if we make films about America, it's usually about military-industrial complex, and though this exists, it's very important to overcome stereotypes for both sides, not only for you and not only for us, but for both.

Kate: Soviet films about the U.S. relate mainly to the military?

Vladimir: No, I just mentioned this example. But we have some stereotyped vision of life here too, usually about some kind of negatives, about unemployment, about some homeless, and so on.

Kate: There is a movie in the Soviet Union, I think it's called *The Man on West Fourth Street*, about a homeless man in New York City. Some of the people I met in the Soviet Union had seen this movie, and they seemed very upset by the plight of homeless people.

Vladimir: Yes, at least it's the truth but not the whole truth, and it's possible to find only one segment and to

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show it to people, negative segment, yes? Only one segment of the whole life. And at least what has been shown in Moscow it was not lie, it was truth, because it was real man, and real things happened, but I suppose it would be better if we would have such relations where we will show not only negatives but positives about each other. It would be better.

Kate: I think we'll get there. If American people were going to read Soviet authors, which ones would you suggest they read, that would give them a very good idea of life in the Soviet Union today?

Vladimir: You know, we have a lot of writers who are writing about our contemporary life, Astafiev, and Ribakov, and Rasputin, a new generation of Soviet writers, and if we talk about classic writers, I suppose people in America know Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, but it's actually impossible to find [English translations of contemporary Soviet authors] here.

Kate: In our library here in Eugene we have translations...

Vladimir: Yes, but...

Kate:... of Trifonov and Aitmatov.

Vladimir: Yes, they are very prominent writers now, and a lot of books are very interesting now, a lot of very talented writers, but actually I asked a lot of people here, "Do you know some Russian or Soviet writers?" Usually they know Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. That's it, and they don't know some contemporary writers, just don't know.

But if you ask in Moscow—and I suppose you have such an opportunity—[Soviet] people will say a lot of [American] authors, and it's possible to read because there's a lot of translation, and a lot of publications, and the circulation is just surprising, it's millions and millions of books translated from English, if it's possible to say from American, a lot of contemporary American writers. As to me, I like two American writers, Jack London and Dreiser, that's my two favorite. Mark Twain, yes, I like it, but just when I was a child, I read a lot of Mark Twain. I have a lot of volumes of Mark Twain in my home. Actually, we start being a child on the same level, with Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Jack London. It's actually the same level of interest.

Kate: Do you read any contemporary American writers?

Vladimir: Maybe I am not example because I am here and I have opportunity to read everything but... I cannot say that it's possible to buy in Moscow now just from the shelf, because it's a big demand, and if something is on sale, in two hours, shelves are empty. There would be a big line—the same with Soviet authors—it's a big demand. You know, if you were invited to some Soviet apartments, I'm sure you saw a lot of books, many, many books in every apartment, and it's not 10 or 20, it's hundreds of books.

At this point Vladimir had to leave for another appointment. I still had some more questions left that I hadn't asked him yet, so he said to choose one and he'd answer that before he went.

Kate: Okay. What are your favorite things to do when you're not working?

Vladimir: To take care of my sons, to be with my wife, and it's not so often when I have a lot of time, because especially here [at the consulate in San Francisco] half of Sundays and usually all Saturdays I have to be involved in some kind of business, we have a lot of delegations, a lot of guests, and so on, and if I have some hours, I just prefer to read something new, some new book, and maybe to spend one or two hours at the beach, far from crowd, far from people, just to have a rest. In two words, to read, and to have a rest.

DANCE

Kiken Chin: "The dance is my life."

by David Bowman

The word "between" means midway, neither one thing or another. It aptly and absolutely describes the meaning and sensibility of Kiken Chin's dance performances, because they show us what might lie between, or behind, the superficial motions of our lives. But in another way, Chin's performances—each is titled *Between*, though they are never the same dance—are not remotely "between" or "midway" anything. They are fully committed, passionate pieces that seize and refract the joy, surprise, and pain of experience. There's no fence-sitting about it.

Chin insists that in the dance world the type of work he does has no legitimate ground on which to exist. "People have too narrow an idea what dance is, and refuse to talk about dance in new ways," he says, lamenting that his kind of self-expression is trapped somewhere inside critics' and journalists' pigeonholes of "post-modernist dance" and "performance art." Part of the reason for this, Chin says, is that ballet dominates the dance world to the point of squelching other, less formalized types of expression. "Obviously," Chin says, "ballet shows technique. But the minute you're not all technique, you get labeled as 'avant garde,' or 'postmodern,' and that's not always accurate."

The technique Chin does display in *Between* is not flaunted or foregrounded. Emotion is. What his dance is built from, and what it expresses, is sheerly personal. "The dance you see on stage is my life," he says. "Every time I work, I feel the creation process inside me, and I think of it as pregnancy—though obviously I cannot know what that's like. But to me, performance nights are like labor and birth."

Chin insists that there is no message planted in his art. "It always surprises

me when people say they get a specific statement from my performances," he says. "What I'm doing on stage, simply, is showing my life." This, of course, points to the success of Chin's work, his ability to present something universal through movement, his ability to leave his ideas open to interpretation.

His next performance, scheduled for May 1 and 2 at the University of Oregon's Gerlinger Gym, will be presented by Eugene's Gay and Lesbian Alliance. Chin says that GALA's offer to produce his work proves to him that "organizations without money are the ones with true interest in the arts," and that organizations designated to support artists, such as various arts commissions and councils, "in reality do the least to help art."

GALA and Chin are not collaborating to present a specific theme or issue in the May dance performance, says Chin, a self-avowed anti-politician. "I don't believe that art can make any real political change," he says, "though, of course, individuals' perceptions of performance can lead to political action."

Chin neither associates or disassociates himself with/from GALA, though he seems to be interested in identifying, and therefore devaluing, the various artificial roles that society imposes on its citizens. "I hate to identify myself using labels that refer to sexuality or even nationality," he says. "One of the things I resent about the U.S. is that people often ask me about my nationality. I refuse to assign one to myself. I was born in Japan, my parents are Chinese, and I have an American passport. I am a human being," he says. "And in an ideal realm, I would fall in love with someone who is neither a 'man' or a 'woman,' but who is a human being."

