

Russian star predicts glorious future for the Vic



Igniting the Victoria...actress Elena Stejko

Her performance at The Victoria Theatre's gala opening last year was the first time most locals had seen actress Elena Stejko in action. It was the start of a busy year for the glamorous Russian who has called Devonport home for the past 16 years. She talked to Angela Kemp.

Anyone who was lucky enough to be at The Vic's gala night could not have failed to be impressed by Elena Stejko's performance in an excerpt from Ibsen's *The Doll House*.

She brought all the skills she has learned in 20 years in the industry to a mesmerising performance that captivated the audience.

Someone who practices what she preaches, Stejko runs the Actors Studio where she tutors acting technique based on K Stanislavsky and Michael Chekhov.

She also runs children's drama classes in Devonport, and earlier this year, set up the

Outbox Theatre Company based at The Vic.

As well as providing a vehicle to showcase her pupils' acting abilities, Stejko said she wanted Outbox to encourage literacy in its audiences and help to establish a theatre going culture in New Zealand, something she thinks is sadly lacking.

As an actress, Stejko has worked on stage and screen in Russia, Brazil, New Zealand and Japan but it is thanks to her Devonport connection that she has possibly achieved the luckiest break of her career.

She co-stars in the widely-acclaimed *Kiwi*

MITCHELL KEELING & ASSOCIATES LTD

**Registered Valuers and
Property Consultants**

Phone 445 6212



153 Lake Road, Belmont

Pharmacy & Naturopathy

Our Combined Knowledge - Optimising Your Health

In Store Naturopath & Homeopath & Pharmacist

Stockists of:

Blackmores; Clinicians; Ethical Nutrients; Go Healthy;
Inner Health; Kordels; Kiwi Herb; Malcolm Harker; Natures Way;
Nordic Fish Oils; Nutralife; Radiance; Thompsons; Wagner



Belmont Pharmacy

143 Lake Rd, Devonport • Ph 445 8247

film, 'Russian Snark' by Devonport writer Stephen Sinclair.

The film, released in June (this year at the Rialto Cinema) and scheduled to open at The Vic on September 29, has won a clutch of awards, not least a 'best actress' nomination for Stejko in the Qantas Film and Television Awards 2010.

Sinclair wrote the screenplay of 'Russian Snark' for Stejko after hearing about an amazing journey by some of her fellow countrymen.

The film was inspired by castaways Boris Bainov and Renata Pavlenko, who floated to New Zealand from Vladivostok in a converted lifeboat in 1999.

The couple's voyage in a small aluminium lifeboat provided the talented Sinclair with a springboard to examine the conflict between being an artist and a human.

The writer's feature film debut is a bittersweet comedy about two refugee artists (played by Stejko and Stephen Papps) from Russia getting to grips with life in New Zealand.

One critic described Stejko's performance as Nadia as "bringing a glowing blonde vitality to her every scene".

The couple attended the film's premiere in June.

"It was unbelievable. Renata and I looked like sisters and Stephen Papps and Boris looked like twin brothers.

"They loved the film.

"They were at sea for six months - it was the most brave thing you can imagine for anyone to do and they didn't know where they were going to end up.

"I was absolutely horrified at the idea that this girl, who at the time was 22, was at sea all this time with no idea what was going to happen. I never dreamt I would play her years later.

"I do believe that the film has magic, it has a loving heart in it and speaks to people in different ways at different levels.

"I really hope the film will sprinkle its

magic around the world."

Growing up in Kiev, Ukraine, the young Stejko enjoyed acting and dancing from an early age.

Stejko is thrilled to have been invited to her home city of Kiev, somewhere she hasn't been for 20 years, for the film's opening there.

"I was surrounded by art galleries where I grew up and my parents used to take me to them two or three times a week and the theatre but circus was my thing.

"I finished musical school, I played piano, I was lead singer for a long time, did ballet for ten years before changing to modern dance, I was doing fencing, gymnastics

"I have always been very active and very, very driven by directing things.

"Creating celebrations is what I'm all about. I live celebrations.

"When I opened up my Actors Studio we had a table 25 metres long and I invited 300 guests.

"We made a Russian borscht made from buckets of potatoes and beetroot."

Her acting career started as a clown and mime artist, working for various children's theatre companies in Russia.

Her most recent stage work was in Auckland Theatre Company's 'Romeo and Juliet' as Lady Capulet. She plays the lead female in a Japanese TV drama 'The Promise' in Tokyo.

Her television work includes Shortland Street, Mercy Peak and Spin Doctors and she co-wrote the script for the NZ film 'Rain' with

director Christine Jeffs.

She said she was delighted to have the chance to work out of the Victoria Theatre, as she was part of the campaign to get it re-opened.

"Devonport is the best community space and location you can imagine in New Zealand and it is vital we have a theatre."

Although it has its limitations, Stejko said she was using them to her advantage.

"It has limitations of time, 45 minutes is the longest we can perform because of the cinema timetable.


"We don't have well set up dressing rooms but it's a great venue and nothing to me would be an obstacle. I will make sure I will align my actors in a way that they will see it as an adventure."

She has directed five shows this year as well as Chekhov's Three Sisters with Unitec students and in November she is directing Geoff Allen's 'The Secret Life of a Belly Dancer' at The Pump House.

Stejko predicts a rosy future for live drama at The Vic and said she had lots of ideas for forthcoming shows both for adults and children.

• Russian Snark opens with a question and answer session on Thursday September 29, and screens every day until October 5 and possibly beyond. We have four double passes to give away.

Email devonportflagstaff@orcon.net.nz with Russian Snark in the subject line to go in the draw.



for unique vision care contact Visique on Quay, we're only a ferry ride away.

VISIQUE OPTOMETRISTS
ESTABLISHED 1978

Ground Floor PWC Tower, 188 Quay St, Auckland
Phone 373 3701



Ask about our curtain making discounts

FREE IN HOME CONSULTATIONS | HUGE SELECTION OF FABRICS | OUR GUARANTEE OF QUALITY

28 Hurstmere Rd, Takapuna Beach, Auckland | Phone 09 486-1103
 Fax 09 489-6136 sales@homefabrics.co.nz | www.homefabrics.co.nz

HOME FABRICS