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Bank of Russia

The magic of the theatre

'If only miracles could really exist today, they would only be possible on the stage!' wrote Konstantin Stanislavsky, an outstanding Russian theatre director, actor and teacher. Having appeared in the ancient times, the art of theatre has lived through many historical periods without losing its profoundness, significance and the adoration by the public. The theatrics is truly international, yet, at the same time, the names of great actors and theatre directors are the patrimony of respective peoples and nations. Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, Marius Petipa and Feodor Chaliapin, Mikhail Shchepkin and Alexander Yuzhin, Galina Ulanova and Mikhail Zharov – all these outstanding practitioners of the Russian theatre are part of the Russian and world cultural heritage alike.

To mark the contribution made by Russia to the theatrics, the Bank of Russia has opened its exhibition of commemorative coins. The project bears the symbolic name 'The Magic of the Theatre' coinciding with the inscription (or legend in numismatic terms) on one of recently issued coins. The aim of the exhibition is to show the theatre via the exquisite art of artists-medallists making commemorative coins commissioned by the Bank of Russia.

The specifics of the subject required the participation of consultants – specialists in the design, mintage and manufacture of coins. Only these persons were able to share their knowledge about events which they once witnessed, and which already belong to history.

From the very beginning, the exhibition was open to the public not only in Moscow, but also in other large Russian cities, where the art of actors and ballet have always been much appreciated. The exhibition has travelled to more than fifty Russian cities and has been shown in the theatres where the stories told via coins attract

much interest and attention of the public.

The Bank of Russia museum holds one of the most comprehensive collection of commemorative coins worldwide. Among them, coins devoted to the theatre occupy a rightful place. The halls of the exhibition demonstrate original coins produced by the St Petersburg and Moscow Mints, as well as gypsum moulds that often preceded the creation of these sculptures of minor forms. The history of the mintage of Russian commemorative coins dedicated to the theatre started more than thirty years ago. The first coin was minted back in 1989 from cupronickel and was dedicated to the 150th birthday of Modest Mussorgsky, an outstanding Russian composer. Over one hundred coins dedicated to the theatre have been issued since that time: first by the USSR and starting from 1992 – by the Bank of Russia.

Around twenty of the most expressive and artistically made coins were selected for this project. The opening exhibit is the Magic of the Theatre (Picture 1), a 3-ruble silver coin issued by the Bank of Russia in 2018. The coin features the famous opera singer Medea Figner, a solo singer at the Mariinsky Theatre. Her talent was highly appreciated by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. Figner was the first to perform the title role in Tchaikovsky's opera *Iolanta* (the coin shows her image in this opera). The right side of the coin features the figures of dancers from the famous ballet *Nutcracker*. Figuratively speaking, this coin may be considered to be devoted to Tchaikovsky personally who made an incredible contribution to the Russian musical art, elevating it to unprecedented heights.

The portrait of P. Tchaikovsky (Picture 3) is minted on a 100-ruble gold coin issued in 1993, which is also demonstrated at the exhibition. Among all Russian cultural figures, Tchaikovsky is the indisputable leader by

the number of images on coins: around three dozen of Bank of Russia commemorative coins are devoted to him, and his ballets and operas. For the first time, his image appeared on a cupronickel coin manufactured in the USSR (in 1990) to mark the 100th birthday of the great composer. It is interesting to note that the portrait of this musical genius could have appeared on banknotes as early as in the 1990s, however the project was not approved, and the final sketches of banknotes were added to GOZNAK's museum rarities.

In 1998, two types of silver coins were issued to commemorate the 135th birthday of Konstantin Stanislavsky, the outstanding director, founder and head of the Moscow Art Theatre. One of them features a scene from Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depths* (Picture 6), where Stanislavsky performed the part of Satin. The minted theatre curtain bears the emblem of the theatre designed by the architect Fyodor Schekhtel – the famous Chekhov's seagull.

In 2009, Russia marked the 200th birthday of Nikolai Gogol, a great Russian writer whose plays have been successfully performed by many national theatres up to now. As Gogol once said, 'Theatre is no trifle and it is really serious, given the fact that it holds enough room for a crowd of five to six thousand persons and that this crowd consisting of quite diverse people can be swept away by one and the same feeling, can shed tears and laugh in unison. It is a tribune from which you can say many good things to the world.'

Four commemorative coins from the series devoted to this classic of Russian literature bear the images of Gogol's famous characters. One of these coins, a 100-ruble silver coin (Picture 7), was awarded the Diploma of the international competition of commemorative coins Coin Constellation 2010 in the Best Artistic Solution category for the exquisite composition and production. This coin is 10 cm in diameter, thus giving sufficient space for the plots of several Gogol's works, including *The Night before Christmas*, *The Overcoat*, *The Nose*, and *The Deal Souls*. The foreground is taken by the famous scene of Khlestakov's outrageous lies from the Government Inspector comedy.

'I produce a performance like a ballet... When I start working on a new performance, I always know its future style, i.e., whether this will be an oil painting, watercolour, graphic work, or poster,' wrote Yuri Lyubimov, a famous theatre director. In 1964, he headed the Moscow Drama and Comedy Theatre, creating the phenomenon of the Taganka Theatre, the most breakthrough and daring theatre in the Soviet Union. In 2017, to mark his 100th birthday, the Bank of Russia issued a silver coin bearing his portrait (Picture 8).

In 2011, the centenary of Arkady Raykin (Picture 9), an outstanding Soviet actor, was celebrated. According to

the writer Lev Kassil, his contemporary, Raykin's performance was 'a theatre in itself'. To celebrate this jubilee, the St Petersburg Mint issued a special silver coin.

This is an extraordinary coin for several reasons. Thanks to it, Russian commemorative coins started to feature the genre of variety theatre. Moreover, the coin dedicated to Raykin is so far the only one among other 'theatre' coins that was manufactured using computer modelling technology replacing the work of a sculptor.

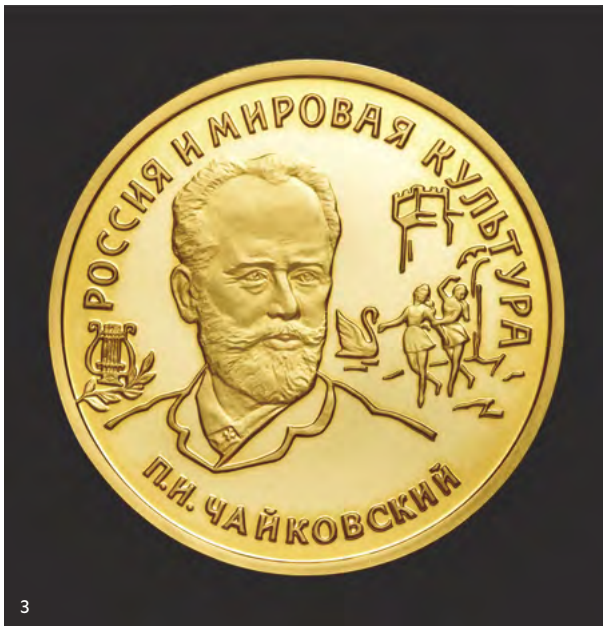
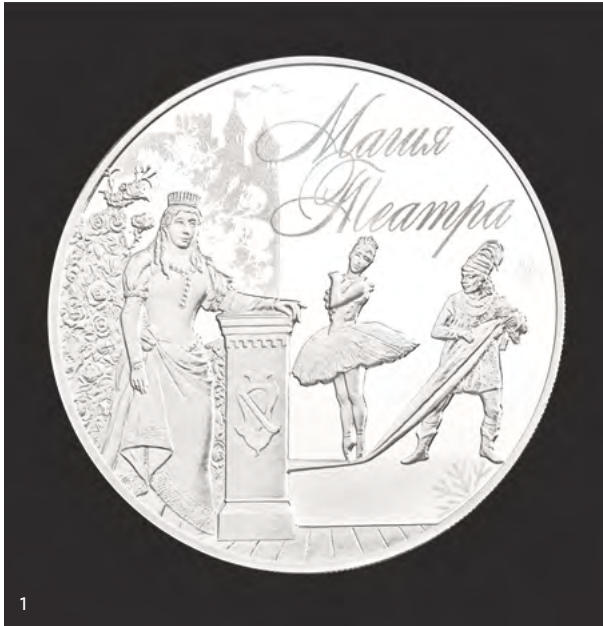
Bank of Russia coins feature famous personalities from Russia and other states. In 2013, a 25-ruble silver coin was issued in the Treasury of World Culture series; it was dedicated to creative works by Giuseppe Verdi (Picture 5). The reputation of an outstanding Italian composer and master of opera attracted to him customers from all over the world. The operas *Les Vepres Seciliennes* and *Don Carlo* were composed for the Paris Opera, and *Aida* was created for the opera house of the Egyptian Khedive in Cairo. Verdi composed the opera *La Forza del Destino* specially for the Russian theatre. Therefore, in addition to the composer's portrait, the coin features a page from the music scores of *La Forza del Destino* and an image of the Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre in Saint Petersburg where the opera premiered in 1862.

The coin issued in 2011 and devoted to the Year of Spain in Russia and the Year of Russia in Spain (Picture 10) presents the joint creative work by Russian and Spanish artists-medallists. They were united by one subject shared by both countries – Don Quixote. The novel *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* was presented to the world literature by the Spanish writer Cervantes, whereas the ballet *Don Quixote* composed by Ludwig Minkus is Russia's gift to the world culture. The coin features an image of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance himself from the Cervantes' novel and Kitri, a lyric character of Minkus' ballet. Marius Petipa created the first adaptation of this ballet in 1869. Forty years later, in 1990, it was followed by Gorsky's revival which won the world acknowledgement for the ballet *Don Quixote*.

A separate group of coins comprises those which feature famous theatre productions. To mark the 225th anniversary of the Bolshoi Theatre in 2001, the Bank of Russia issued seven coins with the scenes from the ballets *Spartakus* (Picture 16), *The Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the operas *Ivan Susanin*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *The Gambler*.

Compared to the musical theatre, the drama theatre is presented on commemorative coins less extensively.

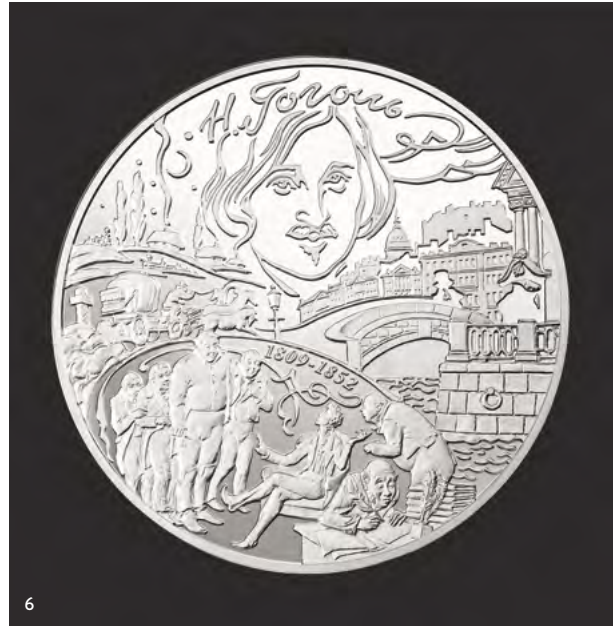
However, this makes it even more exciting for theatre experts and lovers to guess the plots of well-known plays on the coins dedicated to writers, actors, and directors. For instance, in 2009 the Bank of Russia issued



1. The magic of theatre, 3 rubles / 2018, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 31.1 g, 39 mm in diameter, mintage of 2000 pcs, Artists: E.V. Kramskaya (obverse), A.D. Schablykin (reverse), Sculptor: A.A. Dolgoplova
2. The Novosibirsk state academic opera and ballet theatre, 3 rubles / 2005, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 31.1 g, 39 mm in diameter, mintage of 10000 pcs, Series: Architectural Monuments of Russia, Artists: A.V. Baklanov, E.V. Kramskaya, Sculptor: A.A. Dolgoplova
3. I. Tchaikovsky, 100 rubles / 1993, Gold 900/1000, proof, fine metal content 15.55 g, 30 mm in diameter, mintage of 5700 pcs, Series: Contribution of Russia to World Culture, Artist: A.V. Baklanov, Sculptor: A.A. Nosov
4. Creative work of Giuseppe Verdi, 25 rubles / 2013, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 155.5 g, 60 mm in diameter, mintage of 1000 pcs, Series: Treasury of World Culture, Artist: A.D. Schablykin, Sculptor: A.F. Andronov



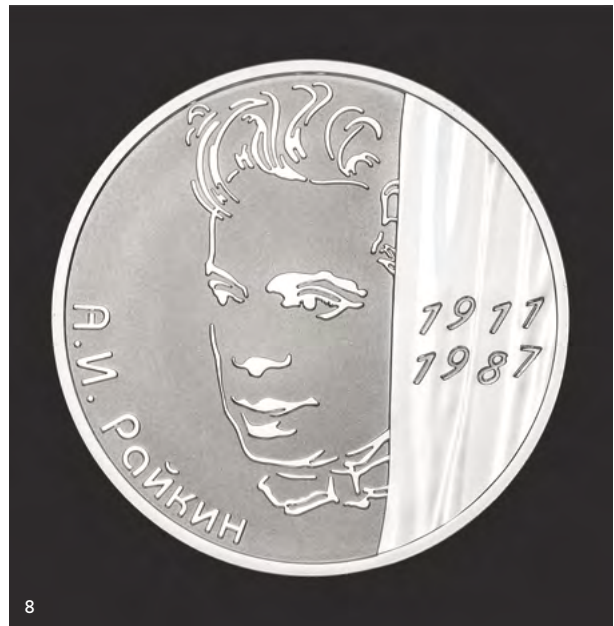
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5. 135th birth anniversary of K.S.Stanisavsky, 2 rubles / 1998, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 15.5 g, 33 mm in diameter, mintage of 15000 pcs, Artist: A.V. Baklanov, Sculptor: A.A. Dolgoplova

6. 200th birth anniversary of N.V. Gogol, 100 rubles / 2009, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 1000 g, 100 mm in diameter, mintage of 500 pcs, Artist: S.A. Kozlov, Sculptor: Yu.S. Gogol

7. 100th birth anniversary of the theatre director Yu.P. Lyubimov, 2 rubles / 2017, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 15.5 g, 33 mm in diameter, mintage of 3000 pcs, Series: Architectural Monuments of Russia, Artists: E.V. Kramskaya (obverse), A.D. Schablykin (reverse), Sculptors: A.A. Dolgoplova (obverse), A.N. Bessonov (reverse)

8. Actor A.I.Raikin — 100th birth anniversary, 2 rubles / 2011, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 15.5 g, 33 mm in diameter, mintage of 3000 pcs, Series: Outstanding Personalities of Russia, Artist: S.A. Kozlov, Technique: Computer modelling



9. The year of Spain in Russia and the year of Russia in Spain, 3 rubles (10 euros in Spain) / 2011, Silver 925/1000, proof, fine metal content 31.1 g, 39 mm in diameter, mintage of 5000 pcs, Artists and sculptors: A.V. Baklanov, Begona Castellanos

10. Russian ballet, 50 rubles / 1993, Gold 900/1000, brilliant uncirculated, fine metal content 7.78 g, 22,6 mm in diameter, mintage of 4700 pcs, Series: Russian Ballet, Artist and sculptor: A.V. Baklanov

11. The Nutcracker, 10 rubles / 1996, Gold 900/1000, proof, fine metal content 1.55 g, 12 mm in diameter, mintage of 7500 pcs, Series: Russian ballet, Artist: A.V. Baklanov, Sculptor: S.A. Kornilov

12. The Nutcracker, 100 rubles / 1996, Silver 900/1000, proof, fine metal content 1000 g, 100 mm in diameter, mintage of 1000 pcs, Series: Russian Ballet, Artist: A.V. Baklanov, Sculptor: A.A. Dolgoplova



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13. 225th anniversary of the Bolshoi theatre, 100 rubles / 2001, Gold 999/1000, proof, fine metal content 15.55 g, 30 mm in diameter, mintage of 1500 pcs, Artist: A.V. Baklanov, Sculptor: I.S. Kornilov

3-ruble and 100-ruble silver coins in the Outstanding Personalities of Russia series devoted to the 150th birthday of Anton Chekhov. The writer's works thereon are presented by his drama: scenes from the plays *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Moreover, when casting a more attentive glance at the scene from the first act of *The Seagull* shown on the 3-ruble commemorative coin, one can see a gun hanging on the wall, which is exactly the gun that must fire in the last act, according to Chekhov.

Coins issued in the Russian Ballet series remain among acknowledged masterpieces thanks to the elegance of their lines and the high quality of mintage. Precious metals were first used for their production back in the Soviet time, beginning from 1989. The subject was not selected by chance. The Russian ballet is a universal art independent of language, a global brand demonstrating the skills of Russian choreographers, composers and actors. By the beginning of the 20th century, it occupied a prominent place in the world culture. The Russian ballet first won international acclaim thanks to the *Ballets Russes* seasons, organised in Paris and London in 1907–1914. Later on, this glory was amplified by Ulanova, Pliset-skaya, Vasilyev, and other Russian stars.

Since 1993, this famous series of coins has been issued by the Bank of Russia. They embody the artistic talent of the medallier artist Aleksandr Baklanov, a people's artist of Russia. The photographs of famous Russian ballet dancers, including Anna Pavlova and Galina Ulanova, were the source of inspiration for the artist. 'There exist easily recognisable photos and poses,' Baklanov used to say. 'Looking at photos, one can easily distinguish between Anna Pavlova and Natalia Dudinskaya or between Yekaterina Maximova and Galina Ulanova'. Notwithstanding the fact that the artist tried to avoid a portrait-like similarity with particular ballet dancers, one can easily recognise the great Anna Pavlova by her movements, poses and image on the 50-ruble gold coin issued in 1993 (Picture 12). Pavlova became the prototype of another commemorative silver coin belonging to the series *Contribution of Russia to World Culture*.

Coins in the Russian Ballet series (and many other coins) have several quality categories, of which the proof quality remained the most glamorous, as the matte relief image made a contrast to the mirror-like background. 'The idea was to show ... only silhouettes', recalled Aleksandr Baklanov. 'To make coins clear and simple. Compared to a scene, a silhouette is a more complicated theme for coins, because it is impossible to conceal anything, whether proportions, perspectives, or details! The task was interesting, though challenging.'

As in many other cases, when commemorative coins are created, the appearance of the Russian Ballet series was

preceded by thorough preparations. Thus, the work on the gold coin *Nutcracker* issued in 1996 (Picture 14) started in the museum of the Mariinsky Theatre. The design of the coin was based on the archive photos of the first performance of the *Nutcracker* in 1892 where the role of *Nutcracker* was danced by Sergey Legat, a future premier dancer with the Mariinsky Theatre. The images of the dancer's pose, face and costume reflect the scenes of Tchaikovsky's ballet choreographed by Lev Ivanov.

The famous ballet also became the subject of a 100-ruble silver coin (Picture 15) issued in 1996 and recognised as the best silver coin of the year by the *World Coin News* magazine. Artists-medallists consider silver to be the best metal for coins, as it allows the most complicated and detailed design. The decorative properties of silver, its plasticity, range of tones and structure create real 'pictures in metal', by far surpassing gold and palladium in all these aspects. In addition to coins dedicated to actors, composers, writers, and theatre productions, it is also worth mentioning a set of coins featuring theatre buildings – these 'temples of Muses'. The front of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow was shown on coins many times: in 1991, 1993, and 1997, as well as in 2001 on the coins issued to mark the 225th anniversary of this theatre. One can see the building of the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg on the 1993 coin devoted to Anna Pavlova. A 2005 silver coin features the building of the Novosibirsk State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre (Picture 2), one of the largest theatre buildings in Russia (it was officially opened in 1945 premiering the opera *Ivan Susanin* by Mikhail Glinka). In the same year, the St Petersburg Mint issued a coin bearing an image of the Musa Dzhilil Tatar State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.

An image of the Hermitage Theatre in St Petersburg appeared on the coin in 2012. Recently, in 2019, the Bank of Russia issued a 3-ruble commemorative silver coin to celebrate the 550th anniversary of the foundation of Cheboksary. Among other places of interest, this coin features an image of the front of the Russian Drama Theatre.

'*Ars longa, vita brevis*' ('Art is long, life is short', latin), said theatre lovers who lived in ancient Rome. One can say that theatre is an all-time phenomenon. Therefore, during turning points in history, in all times and in all places, it will remain a worthy and attractive subject, including as a subject for minting coins of different states and peoples. In a certain way, all this suggests the idea of the synthesis of arts when great music and performance by famous actors are embodied in sculptural images on coins.

Alexander Bugrov