

Russian Actor Reaches 100, Is Set for Stage Again

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Vladimir Zeldin turned 100 years old on Tuesday. Above, Zeldin on stage in 2012 aged 97.

The world's oldest living stage actor, 100-year-old Vladimir Zeldin, was set to celebrate his centenary Tuesday with a gala performance at the Russian Army Theater in Moscow attended by the elite of the local theater world and Sergei Ivanov, chief of the presidential staff.

The actor, who traditionally performs on his birthday, was to star in a special evening performance called "100 or Dancing with Time" which he told Russian media was "a catastrophe, but with the taste of a holiday."

Born in 1915, two years before the Russian Revolution, Zeldin grew up in the Tambov region of central Russia. He moved to Moscow in 1924 and eventually, after being turned down by the navy because of his bad eyesight, became an actor.

Zeldin told Russian media that he is not keen on birthday celebrations and that the event was

not his idea “but I cannot do anything about it.”

Nevertheless, the actor, who looks not a day over 75, was to be on stage for two and a half hours telling tales of his long and celebrated life and chatting with his fans, state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

“I am genuinely glad that on such a memorable date you will be in such wonderful creative form on the stage of the legendary Theater of the Russian Army,” said President Vladimir Putin in an official message posted on the Kremlin website.

Zeldin has long defied worries about his age stopping him performing — he still appears regularly at the theater, which has the biggest stage in the world.

The actor rose to fame after starring in Ivan Pyryev’s romantic 1941 musical “They Met in Moscow.” Zeldin played a Dagestani shepherd who falls for a pig herder from the Russian countryside when they meet at an agricultural exhibition in Moscow.

The film is said to have saved his life. War started not long after the film was finished and Zeldin was sent off to a tank division but Stalin, who watched and monitored the country’s films, ordered the movie be recut and Zeldin was ordered to come back for the reshoot.

“I have seen everything in life. Hunger, suffering, poverty, unrestrained cruelty. I have heard the songs of the hell-raiser in bars, and the groans of the poor on the street, I have seen how my comrades died on the battle field,” said Zeldin in one gala performance where he spoke of his life, the NTV television channel reported.

Zeldin’s next film was also with Pyryev, a giant of Soviet cinema of the time, when he played a pianist in the 1948 film “Symphony of Life.” Zeldin reportedly learned to play one of Liszt’s piano concertos for the film, RIA Novosti reported.

He also starred in Andrei Konchalovsky’s production of “Uncle Vanya” and Stanislav Govorukhin’s version of the Agatha Christie mystery classic “And Then There Were None.”

Zeldin joined the Red Army Theater in 1946 when he first played Aldemaro in Spanish writer’s Lope de Vega’s “The Dance Master.” The play was made into a film in 1952, which is said to have set Soviet women’s hearts aflutter. He began receiving letters from all over the Soviet Union.

One of his more recent performances is as Don Quixote in “Man of La Mancha,” a 1960s American musical which is based on Miguel de Cervantes’ masterpiece. Zeldin got the role at the age of 90.

“When I see kind eyes, when I hear the applause, when they come to the stage or to me backstage after the show and queue up so that I can autograph my book ‘My profession is Don Quixote.’ I cannot turn them down,” Zeldin said.

In 2013, Zeldin was one of the torchbearers for the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

Tributes flowed in to Zeldin on Tuesday, including one from former Culture Minister Mikhail Shvydkoi.

“Seventy years ago you won us all over with your ‘Dance Master’ and today you have become for us all a teacher of life,” said Shvydkoi.

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