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has there been  
such a close  
relationship  
between an  
artist and  
a pope



# An Artist and the Pope

By  
Curtis Bill Pepper

The moving, intimate story of the unusual friendship between Pope John XXIII and the communist artist Giacomo Manzu. A relationship that culminated in Manzu's famous doors for St. Peter's in Rome and a series of remarkable sculpted portraits of the Pope. In telling the story, Curtis Pepper, former Chief of Newsweek's Rome office, uses Manzu's own personal recollections, together with 36 pages of drawings and photographs of his sculpture. Some in full color, and many created especially for this book. The result is a biographical masterpiece with significance for all.

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## State of Affairs

Henry Brandon

### Leningrad's *Enfant Terrible*

FEW PEOPLE exude as much joy of life as did Nikolay Akimov, the director of the Small Comedy Theater in Leningrad, who died the other day at the age of sixty-seven. He was not an avant-garde artist, but an avant-garde human being. I saw him in his dingy backstage office a few years ago, but never wrote about our conversation because I feared that it might embarrass him or cause him harm. He spoke with extraordinary frankness; he was something of an *enfant terrible*, and he enjoyed this role. Although I came to see him in the company of a Russian acquaintance of mine, whom he did not know, he spoke as if nobody else was listening to our conversation. He did not seem to care what might happen if I quoted him, and he never indicated that anything he said was not for publication. On the contrary, his little blue eyes twinkled sheepishly whenever he said something he knew he should not have said to a foreigner because the authorities would disapprove of it.

Our conversation was in French and what he told me at the time is still true, maybe even more so. For maybe half an hour, we talked about the latest trends in the theater, and Akimov proved familiar with not only all the latest plays produced in the West, but also with most of the leading actors and producers. He felt that the theater's mission was not only to entertain but to fulfill a political role which went well beyond the kind of criticism of the bureaucracy, or the inefficiency of industry, or the laziness of the farmers permitted on the stage in the Soviet Union. And so, inevitably, our conversation led to censorship.

"It's not easy in the Soviet Union to know at any given time what is permissible and what is not," he said. "There is this invisible 'electric wire,' and you are never quite certain where it is drawn, where the limits are set. You have to try; sometimes you get a shock earlier, sometimes later. It all depends on how adventurous you are. But over the years you get used to it. It may seem to you a risky, even a repulsive game, and even though it has got me into a lot of trouble at times, I enjoy it in a way. . . . Of course, you can imagine that I would prefer life without censorship."

I mentioned to him that the last time I had been in Rumania—where internal

censorship, at least at the time, was almost as strict as in the Soviet Union—I had seen an excellent performance of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, a play that had not yet been produced in the Soviet Union.

"I tried to put on *Rhinoceros* at my theater here, but I was told in advance to abandon the idea. You see, the Soviet censor is extremely sensitive to any play that satirizes and indirectly condemns dictatorship or the police state, even if the play explicitly refers to the Nazi period, as does *Rhinoceros*. Not long ago, for instance, I staged a play by Yevgeni Shvarts called *The Dragon*. It was forbidden during World War II because the dragon, who is killed in the second act, appeared to have some identification with Stalin; but by now, I thought, the censor might be more lenient. The trouble, however, was that the successor to the dragon, the mayor, had some surprising similarities in character and manner with Mr. Khrushchev who, on top of it, had once been mayor of Moscow. *The Dragon* opened though, but only for a few performances. Suddenly I was ordered to take it off the



program. It had run for a few evenings and that was progress, but, alas, not for very long. Franz Kafka's *Trial*, for instance, which has been staged by one or two of our eastern European socialist neighbors, is also a forbidden fruit here."

In anticipation of my meeting with Mr. Akimov, I had gone the night before to see a performance of the current production of a play called *The Judge* at the Small Comedy. It was a long and, to me, tedious play set in the nineteenth century. The staging was old-

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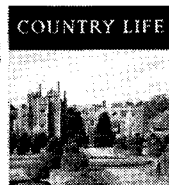
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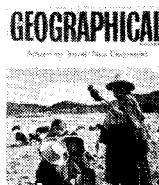
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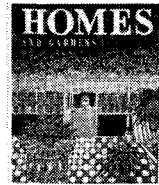
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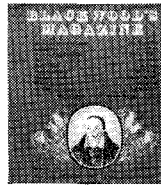
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fashioned, the acting a little stiff and stilted, and the plot almost too complicated for me to follow; nor did it seem to be particularly believable. The play revolves around some trumped-up charges of adultery and how the public officials, in cahoots with the police and the judges, were trying to extort money from a rich family in exchange for a promise that the charges would be quashed. As a greater number of public officials got involved in the conspiracy, and each became greedier, the price went up and up.

When Akimov inquired whether I had enjoyed the play, I expressed surprise that he should have wanted to stage such an obviously dated play with a plot that clearly looked ridiculous today, and seemed so far removed from reality. Akimov, instead of being offended, looked at me amused and not at all surprised. He said he understood and accepted my criticism, but that he was willing at the same time to forgive my naïveté. Then the smile on his face disappeared and he became very serious.

"You see," he said, "contemporary playwrights are permitted a certain amount of freedom to criticize the bureaucracy. But there are definite limits to it. If you want to be a little more daring you have to do it by indirection. This play is about the corruption of the judicial system, about the crude methods officials use if they want to persecute someone. It was written in the 1880s, but what you saw and heard last night sounded very familiar to the audience. That's why they come to see this play; that's why the theater is sold out every night. That's why I dug it out and why it's a success. It is a very contemporary play."

### WIT TWISTER #84

By ARTHUR SWAN

*The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.*

The sharp-horned moon  
— — — — — troops of swollen clouds  
That spill their rain-blood on the corpse-strewn plain.  
Of — — — — — and brambles, witches weave great shrouds  
For — — — — — by the mightier Giants slain.

(Answer on page 37)



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