

director of the theatre, Lev Mashlyatin, is a Jack-of-all-trades. Often he not only directs the performances but also writes their scripts.

The theatre house is quite modest-it can only seat 160 people. The audience is mainly children five to 10 years old. The performances take place mostly on Saturdays and Sundays, because the children are usually accompanied by their parents who are busy on workdays. Since children easily get restless, the performances are just thirty minutes long.

When the light goes out and the curtain rises, the children in the audience find themselves in a fairyland of live shadows, enchanting shadows which capture their imagination. The performances are spectacular, striking, and picturesque; they are accompanied by music. The directors make use of different genres-the ballet, pantomime, clownery and operetta.

...Butterflies fly about, the sea is rough as during a real storm, thirty-three ships float out of the whale's mouth, and the capricious Eastern czar Kalif turns into a stork. The pure, trusting hearts of the children skip a beat... But, as always in a fairy tale, everything ends happily. Good wins over evil.

The company has 18 puppeteers with "light" (a professional term) hands which create the weightless, flickering shadows. The actor must "merge" with the image to operate a shadow puppet. Actor Andrei Novikov managed to transform into a cat so perfectly that the spectators shouted, "The shadow is smiling!"

A black shadow of a flat puppet appears on the screen at which a ray of light is directed. There is a special screen-or even several screens-for every play. The actor holds a stick in his hands with yokes-swings attached to it. Threads stretch from these swings to the moving parts of a puppet made of cardboard, plywood, mica or fibre. The more yokes the more movements a puppet can make. The actor playing the yokes is like a virtuoso pianist whose fingers run over the keys of a piano.



The actors also use so-called "translucent puppets" borrowed from the Chinese theatre of shadows-a many-coloured celluloid puppet which casts a colourful shadow. With long, freely rotating sticks the actors press the puppet closely to the screen and due to the diffused light it seems to shine from within. As a rule, several actors operate such a puppet. If it is a bird, one of them operates its torso, wings and head, and the other, its legs. They have to synchronize their work and even their breathing, for the shadow is extremely shaky. But sometimes even four hands are insufficient-in one of the plays seven people animated a boa constrictor.

Three-dimensional puppets and even live actors sometimes take part in the play together with the black and

