

Title: Movement Training in the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre (GOSET) [1919-1927]  
Author: Mel Gordon, University of California, Berkeley

Since the 1991 rediscovery of Marc Chagall's theatre panels, created for the Moscow GOSET in 1920, the Yiddish-language theatre itself has been the subject of dozens of articles, books, and exhibitions over the past fifteen years. Unfortunately, almost all of the published accounts have emphasized the conflicted political and social aspects of the Russian-Jewish institution, especially through the Stalinist era. Aesthetically, the focus has been directed at the life its leading actor, Solomon Mikhoels, and the graphic artists, like Chagall, who designed its sets and costumes. Little analysis has been given to the GOSET's unique style of acting or movement work.

During the lifetime of the theatre, from 1919 to 1949, most of the critics and spectators -- both Russian and foreign -- heralded the GOSET's strange and super-physical approach to its repertoire of Jewish and international texts. In fact, in the twenties, under Alexis Granovsky's direction, tickets to the Moscow GOSET were extremely difficult to obtain. It was the most successful of the 160-some minority ensembles in the Soviet Union and only one of two ever to tour outside the country.

Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kerr, and Joseph Roth promoted it when it traveled to Central Europe in 1928. Similar to Meyerhold and Tairov's companies, the GOSET had something wondrous and novel in its staging. The vast majority of its audiences, around 80%, in Moscow, Berlin, and Vienna, did not know Yiddish. They came to witness a new kind of acting.

This talk will show the influences of Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, Kasyan Goliezovsky, Meyerhold, and Vakhtagov on the GOSET training. Through Lasar Galpern, the innovative movement instructor, and Granovsky, the GOSET actors created a sensational vocabulary of stylized movement and dance. Film clips, including privately made footage, will accompany the discussion.