

CHIMPO ARTRYPOVICH GIMPOVICH IN

ART OF THE PARTY

by Greg Hildebrand

Arty did not know a single Chimpo, nor had he even heard of a Chimpo who was a Party member. He took a certain pride in this, even though he realized the Party had, up to that point, virtually no interest in admitting any Chimpos. What had changed was Arty's success, nay, world-wide stardom, due to his re-write of *The Merchant of Venice*, cleverly disguised behind the title "*The Merchant of St. Petersburg*". After nearly a year's run in London, New York, and Paris, the author of the re-write was universally hailed a genius; it was a worldwide sensation due in no small part to a very catchy remake of Bobby Darin's "*Splish Splash*", which was a hit in every market it was introduced. . . from the heart of the Congo to Cleveland, Ohio.

This had come to the attention of Party officials, who had reviewed the matter and called Arty to the Big House for an interview. Arty had no reason to think the Party was displeased with anything he'd done, but to be on the safe side, he got his affairs in order, called his mom to tell her that he loved her, asked his neighbor if he would take care of his cat if he didn't make it home that night, or ever.

He took a bus to the Big House, arriving early. He stood outside in the cold and watched people smoke.

In the meeting he was asked who it was he was making his play for.

"It's a musical, Comrade" was Arty's reply.

Then, "Who are you making your musicals for, Comrade Gimpovich?"

"For the People. Art is for the People. This is what Stalin tells us, if I'm not mistaken, Comrade."

"Then why do you suppose your little musical is so popular with the degenerate capitalist pigs in the West?"

“Because, I believe peoples of the world are interested in Russia—Russian artists and Russian art, as well as our glorious history, which is celebrated in “The Merchant of St. Petersburg,” Arty countered.

“Is it not true that you use Western pop songs in your productions?” the Official queried.

“To put a spotlight on all the Western musical silliness: Splish Splash, Shimmy Shimmy KoKo Bop, She Say Oom Dooby Doom, Be Bop A Lula, Wully Bully. They can’t get enough of the stuff. Sadly, Comrade, Soviet citizenry don’t have the same capacity to allow themselves to enjoy the “silly” the way the Westerners can.” Arty was practically pleading.

“This is how you can redeem yourself with the Party,” the Minister paused, and the tension built in the room. “The Party has decided what they want you to write is a musical that Russians will love, with a type of silliness which Russians can enjoy, which will also be panned, or maybe even banned, in the West. Yes, being banned would surely be a bonus in the eyes of the Party.

“Come back in one month’s time to show your progress,” the Minister said, as he waved Arty away.

Arty went back to his dimly lit hovel in the Ministry of Music Building, lit an extra candle, and got down to work. He was confident he could create something that the West would hate, because poo-pooed, disliked, annoyed by . . .these were not viable options.

His new musical must be despised in the West for him to have any chance to get back in the Party’s good graces. He figured if he made his lead character, General George Washington, a degenerate, cross-dressing drug addict, that the Party would surely see this as a good starting point for a musical. Or, at least he hoped he’d gone far enough.

In the musical we find that Washington’s venereal disease has caused him to lose his mind as well as to lose his teeth. Washington cross-dresses only for battles, in hopes that this will frighten the Brits. During battle, Washington skips around the battlefield in the heat of battle, belting out doo-wop songs, as if competing with volleys of rifle fire for attention. And not only do the doo-wop songs seem to fit right in, but that seemed poignant and also seemed to move the story along.

Arty toyed with many ideas for a title for his new musical: "Crossing the Delaware in Underwear" or "Washington the Real Poof", or "Father of A Country, Killer of a Cherry Tree". All these titles were too long. He wanted short and to the point. The title not only needed to fit on the marquee, but also needed to be easily translatable for a world-wide release. . . something that would also look good on a poster. He was informed in a letter from Party officials that members of the Ministry of Entertainment had decided upon "Washington's Follies". It was a title they told Comrade Gimpovich as they showed him the poster art they had chosen, Washington as a Can-Can Dancer lifting his skirt to reveal Union Jack undies. The Party was hoping that this would, if not anger, that it would at least annoy the British, but what Arty hoped was, when the scathing reviews rolled in, that he would be welcomed back into the Party.

He secretly hoped the bourgeoisie play-going crowds in the West, who seemed to enjoy poking fun at themselves, and others, especially their leaders, loved his new musical. So, in his dreams he allowed himself the indulgence with crossed fingers, of believing that the Western crowds would pay to laugh at themselves. And, if his past experiences counted for anything, they were going to eat it up with a spoon. The West ate at least their share, the complete run sold out in a few days, on the strength of the reviews. Many of the tickets resold in auction settings; people came from all corners of the globe to see the show.

Arty's success was monitored by the Party, who summoned him for another interview. He was told to wait in a large wood paneled office, told to sit in a comfortable chair which was facing an empty desk. He sat alone and looked from face to face at the portraits of Party Officials hanging on the walls. They all had one thing in common, they looked like they were hiding something, and, not just any something, but really important somethings. Things a Chimpo would never want to know about.

Arty had just closed his eyes to stop from being tormented by the portraits hanging on the wall. The secretive stares of the party officials, staring down from beyond their graves. Just as he closed his eyes to escape their stares, the door opened behind him.

"Thank you for coming in for this interview, Comrade Gimpovich. Most Chimpos, as I'm sure you are no doubt aware, are rarely fortunate enough to be allowed to

join the Party . . . you, however, comrade, have joined. . . ? I have a copy of your membership form right here, is that not your signature, Comrade Gimpovich?"

The Official held up the form for Arty to see.

"Yes, yes, it is," Arty concurred.

"Yes, yes, it is . . . and when a Party Member in good standing is called upon by our Party, it is that Member's duty, honor and privilege. . .

"Yes!" Arty interrupted. "But, comrade, I made a serious attempt to poke fun at the silly, decadent Westerners. I was more surprised than many, when "Washington Follies" became a world-wide hit. I thought it was doomed to fail from the get-go. I'm told it could have had something to do with the success of "The Merchant of St. Petersburg". They call it residual success, or roll-over success, but since I've only just learned of these things, I don't believe I should be held accountable for such goings-on," Arty argued.

"Theater-goers," the Minister conceded, "and critics alike, there in the West can be mighty crafty with their propaganda."

"They're making it seem like they're pulling all the strings, even in my own musical," Arty pleaded.

"That may be how it seems to you, Comrade, but the Party sees it differently, they believe that if a musical where the West is portrayed as ridiculous is a hit. . . then, a musical where the West is praised, will be, at best, panned, or better yet, banned. Your little play being banned would be your best path back into the Party." Again, the Minister waved Arty away.

Arty got right to work and wrote a serious musical glorifying the West. He titled it "The Pledge", replete with rousing choruses, soaring anthems, packed with honest, heartfelt emotion. It was a flop. Like a fruit rotting in the sun. In Europe it lasted only a few days, becoming more putrid each day. On Broadway, it lasted weeks, because in New York, even rotten fruit can find an audience.

Arty cheered, he thought he was home free. Parties were thrown in his honor, and at one of these parties, a Government Minister heard someone mention a troop of actors, Soviet actors, who were secretly performing "The Pledge", even

though the Party had a world-wide ban on the musical. Anyone performing or even watching it would receive a bullet to the back of the head.

Arty received a letter informing him that he would, sometime in the future be summoned to the Big House for another interview. Arty knew, if he ran from his troubles, it would mean trouble for his mother, and, perhaps even his friends. He waited fully dressed each night so he would be ready, his over-night bag packed with toothbrush, underwear, and a small stack of paper and pencils, in case he ended up somewhere where he would be able to write.

They came for him on a Tuesday in the middle of the night; neither he nor his musicals were ever heard from again.