

From Russia

Diversity and a zest for life punctuate Marina's world

Marina Sonkina still recalls being 18 at Moscow University when her cultural history professor **Uri Lotman** wrote a detailed bibliography on the blackboard in French, German, English and Italian:

“We, the newly-fanged scholars and researchers looked at each other in dismay,” she recalls, “but didn’t dare to raise any objections. Accepted into the Great Temple of Philology, we were treated as his equals. And, if we, for some reason, didn’t have the reading knowledge of a given European language, we still had a week until the next seminar to acquire that knowledge!”

As a Ph.D student of Lotman, Sonkina learned that a variety of disciplines must be explored to study culture, so she studied philosophy, psychology, film, theatre, folklore and visual arts. In 1987, she immigrated to Canada with her small sons, two suitcases, and one hundred dollars, leaving her job teaching at Moscow University. “It was all the Soviet government—a proponent of

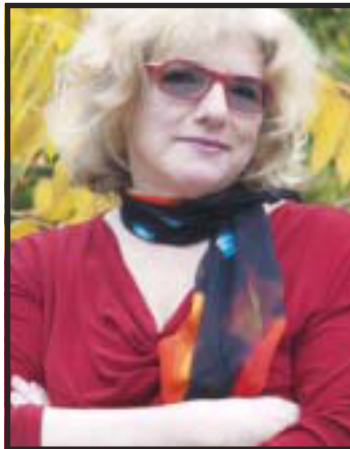
Marxist materialism in theory, but a defender of extreme non-materialism in practice—allowed me to take with me.”

Convinced her sons would eventually be forced into military service for Russia, Sonkina has no regrets about her exodus. One son is now a tenured professor of mathematics at Dalhousie in Halifax; the other returned to Moscow as a Canadian citizen and has achieved success as an actor in 28 films.

In Montreal, Sonkina initially found work in the Russian section of Radio Canada International at CBC. Now teaching literature at UBC and SFU, Sonkina has published a diverse,

third collection of stories, **Lucia's Eyes and Other Stories** (Guernica \$20). The longer stories include ‘Tractorina's Travels,’ about a twice-married Russian who is uneasy about Perestroika, and ‘Carmelita,’ about a volatile, Bohemian painter who has a poignant, sensual and lethal relationship with a much older narrator, Joseph, in Mexico. Sonkina's new children's book is *The Violin That Wanted To See The World* (MW Books).

When not writing and teaching, Marina Sonkina teaches yoga and dances the tango (“with an often unjustified fervor”).



Marina Sonkina: Moscow, nyet

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