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Michael Chekhov as Hamlet in his Second Moscow Art Theatre production, 1924.

# Michael Chekhov as actor, director and teacher in the West: FROM MOSCOW TO LOS ANGELES

*Liisa Byckling*

*Finland's position between the West and the East has proved a good vantage point for theatre research. The work of the famous Russian actor Michael Chekhov in Europe and the United States from 1928 to 1955 has been the object of research of Liisa Byckling for the best part of 90's. She defended her Ph.D. dissertation (in the Russian language) Michael Chekhov in Western Theatre and Cinema in Helsinki in September, 2000. In 2000 Liisa Byckling has lectured on Michael Chekhov in Paris and St.Petersburg.*

Michael (Mikhail) Aleksandrovich Chekhov (1891, St.Petersburg - 1955, Los Angeles) was nephew of **Anton Chekhov** and one of the original members of the Moscow Art Theatre's First Studio where he was taught by the prominent directors **Konstantin Stanislavsky** and **Evgeni Vakhtangov**. He emigrated from Russia in 1928. At the time his death in 1955 Chekhov's name was wiped out from the history of Russian theatre in Soviet Russia. With "glasnost" he was rehabilitated, his books have been republished in Russia and he has become a legendary figure in his native country once again. In Russian opinion, however, his life in emigration is still considered a period of tragedies, despite the fact that Chekhov created and taught an acting system which has become increasingly influential in the West. No complete biography of Michael Chekhov has ever been assembled, despite a strong interest in his life. Chekhov's two autobiographies, *The Path of the Actor* and *Life and Encounters*, are written in an impressionistic style and only cover his earliest career.

It is time to evaluate the great artistic pilgrimage made by an émigré from Moscow to Los Angeles that lasted 27 years.

Talks with Russian theatre people sparked my interest in Chekhov, and I overtook the task of examining his career in the West, at first as a hobby, then, as new archival sources opened

