



Jenya Davidyuk

Jenya is from Novosibirsk, Russia. She moved to Tokyo to work as Japan's only Russian voice actress for anime. She also works as a TV personality and singer, and accompanies orchestra tours of Russia as a singer of anime and video game theme songs. She lives in Tokyo with her Japanese husband and one-year-old daughter.

Series: Friends of Japan

Russian “Seiyu” Puts Heart into Spreading Love of Anime

Being an anime voice actor is a dream job beyond the reach of all but the most dedicated Japanese people. These performers are known in Japanese as *seiyu*. Given the incredible popularity of anime in Japan, the vast majority will unfortunately never achieve success. So how did a young Russian woman from New Siberia beat the odds to become Japan's first ever Russian *seiyu*?

Jenya Davidyuk became fascinated with anime at an early age, at first unaware that it was made in Japan. One of her favorites was the internationally popular anime *Sailor Moon*. Underneath the dubbed Russian dialog, she heard some very foreign-sounding words. Eventually, she learned it was Japanese. She soon fell in love with the language, so much so that she started taking Japanese lessons. Back then, anime was not yet popular in Russia, making it tough for Jenya to buy anime goods. “I had to ask my friends in Moscow and the United States to get them for me,” she laments.

In 2000, Jenya set up an anime fan site. As the page grew, she took the bold step of translating it into Japanese and English, posting audio files of anime songs that she performed in Japanese. Eventually, her site was noticed by a Japanese anime enthusiast, who posted a link to the site on a popular anime bulletin board.

Her newfound Japanese audience was so impressed by her passion for anime that she was invited to take part in a TV show. Accompanied by her father, the then 21-year-old Jenya visited Akihabara, the world capital of anime culture. She was also thrilled to see *seiyu* using their voice talents in the studio.

Returning to Russia after her trip, she became even more enamored with her dream of becoming a *seiyu*, although her Japanese friends warned her that it would be impossible. In 2005 she moved to Japan, at first making ends meet by working as a Russian teacher, freelance translator and Russian language advisor. In 2009, Jenya was overjoyed to

win a small part in a popular anime, *Evangelion: 2.0 You Can (Not) Advance*. The character was a Russian who worked as an operator at a facility called NERV's Bethany Base. Jenya took the original Japanese lines from the script and translated them into Russian for the role.

While continuing to pursue her dream of becoming a *seiyu*, Jenya found herself becoming a regular performer on an NHK TV show for Japanese people wanting to study Russian. “I enjoyed this work immensely. Japanese was hard for me at first, which helps me appreciate that learning Russian can be hard too.”

Her next adventure saw her briefly return to Russia. In 2014, famed conductor Kenichi Shimura was planning the first performance in Russia of the popular Game Symphony Japan concert, in which a full orchestra performs music from computer games and anime shows. He asked Jenya to accompany him as a singer and emcee. “It was a great honor to introduce Japanese culture to my fellow Russians,” she says. The event was a huge success, and Jenya was thrilled to join the orchestra on stage to sing popular anime songs in Japanese and English, bringing her further Russian media attention. She returned most recently to Russia in April 2018 to perform at the Game



Jenya singing *Melodies of Life* from the soundtrack of *Final Fantasy IX*, accompanied by a full orchestra at a Game Symphony Japan concert in Russia.



Meeting fans and signing autographs for the screening of *GIRLS und PANZER das FINALE 1* in Moscow, in April 2018.

Symphony Japan concert, her sixth tour with Shimura.

In 2015 Jenya worked as a Russian translator and dialog coach on a feature-length anime titled *GIRLS und PANZER der FILM*. Thanks to Jenya's dedication and her excellent Japanese, the rest of the crew warmed to her very much; so much so that director Tsutomu Mizushima created a role especially for her. She was asked to play the part of a Russian schoolgirl. “I felt like my 10 years of work in the anime industry had finally paid off. I felt indescribable happiness! Mr. Mizushima made my dreams come true,” she says. Jenya was especially thrilled that the character she played spoke fluent Japanese. The franchise became a big hit and was granted an overseas release, including screenings in Russia, bringing great joy both to Jenya and to the fans and colleagues that had supported her.

Much encouraged by this success, Jenya continues to build her career as a *seiyu*. “The progress I've made so far would have been impossible without my fans and colleagues. They are everything to me. With their continued support, I'll keep developing my *seiyu* skills and perfecting my Japanese, while building cultural bridges by popularizing anime in Russia and beyond.”



Jenya in matching cosplay next to a life-size cardboard cutout of her character Clara from *GIRLS und PANZER der FILM*. ©GPPF



In the recording studio with fellow *seiyu* Sumire Uesaka. Jenya's interview on NHK WORLD-JAPAN is available at: <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/editors/3/2016041501/index.html> ©NHK WORLD-JAPAN