



SYDNEY BALALAIKA ORCHESTRA

NOVOSTI

April 2019 | Issue No. 27/2019



Singin' in the Rain! Ulladulla - 17 March 2019

It rained. It poured. It deluged. But the sound of the rain thundering on the roof of the Ulladulla Civic Centre never dampened the audience's enthusiasm for the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra's first concert for 2019 on 17 March.

It was the second time the SBO had played in Ulladulla, 230 kms south of Sydney. While the rain certainly kept the audience numbers down, it was a reminder that distance does not diminish the enjoyment of our audiences.

The orchestra played a number of old Russian favourites like 'In the Village', 'Two Step' and 'Valenki'. Our much-acclaimed accordion player Richard She gave an outstanding rendition of 'Fantasie in E Minor'. Prima domra soloist Tanya Jephtha transported the audience to the Russian steppe with her evocative performance of 'Mail Troika'. As always, a highlight of the concert was our virtuoso cymbalist Lucy Voronov, who played Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsody' with characteristic brilliance.

A member of the audience pointed out that the concert was held on Saint Patrick's Day.

'Hands up anyone who is Irish!' called musical director, Victor Serghie, to the audience. In response a hand shot up behind him: Patrick O'Neill who was on stage and tuning his balalaika. Patrick has been in the orchestra for nearly 15 years; a reminder that you don't have to be Russian to appreciate Russian music! It was the first time for many years a prima balalaika had sounded among the strings of the SBO.



It was also the first time our new singer, Danny Hawk, sang publicly with the SBO.

The orchestra has lacked a male singer for over a year, so it is pleasing to have a distinctively Russian, male voice back on stage.

Both he and Sophia Markovtzev finished the concert off with a rousing duet of 'Those Were the Days'.

'Those were the days' indeed, in Ulladulla on a very wet St Patrick's Day. Next time we play there, we hope to bring some better weather. Since it always rains in Ireland, perhaps we had better avoid St Patrick's Day!

CONCERTS

UPCOMING

26 May 2019 - Galston Uniting Church

9 June 2019 - Club Marconi, Bossley Park

28 July 2019 - The Russian Club, Strathfield

21 September 2019 - St Sergius Aged Care, Cabramatta

13 October 2019 - Sacred Spaces, Singleton

November 2019 - Washington DC & Wisconsin, USA Tour

CAN YOU HELP?

The SBO is always seeking to perform at new venues and maybe you know somewhere that we can visit and introduce a new audience to our beautiful Russian folk music. We also need additional musicians so if you come up with any ideas please contact our Musical Director, Victor Serghie on 0409 058 895 or our Secretary, Richard She on 0405 622 267.

For details please refer to our website

www.balalaika.com

Promoting the SBO in Moscow



On 11 November last year, musical director Victor Serghie and his wife Millie Serghie found themselves in Moscow attending an international film festival, 'Russia Abroad'. Festival director Sergei Zaitsev had organised the event to commemorate a number of hundred-year anniversaries, including the end of WWI, the birth of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and a hundred years since the execution of the Russian imperial family, the Romanovs.

'Russia Abroad' documents and honours the millions of Russians who left Russia in the aftermath of the 1917 October Revolution.

It was more than just a film festival. Alongside, there were seminars and presentations given by Russian historians and film directors from this great diaspora, and the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra was the subject of one of those presentations.



The House of Russians Abroad (Solzhenitsyn House), Moscow

'For some time the organisers have been trying to get us to talk about the SBO's Russian origins,' said Victor Serghie. "'Russia Abroad" is an organisation set up in the House of Russians Abroad, or Solzhenitsyn House, in central Moscow. The building houses a museum of many treasures donated from abroad which tell a story of Russian life, culture and spirit which survived outside of Russia for a number of generations.

Victor and Millie were born in Harbin, Northern China. Harbin became a flourishing Russian city during the construction of Chinese Eastern Railway, an extension of the Russian Trans-Siberian Railroad, which was built by Russia in late 19th century. It became a little haven of Russian culture in China for refugees, after the Russian Revolution. 'It was effectively a Russian city, with Russian schools and polytechnical colleges, Russian Orthodox churches, theatres, hospitals, etc.' said Millie.

'But it wasn't to last,' added Victor. 'In time we were encouraged by the Chinese Government to migrate out of China, which is how we ended up in Australia. And in a way, that was the genesis of the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra.'

Victor gave a presentation using video clips of the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra, to a packed theatre. 'It isn't as if they hadn't heard of the SBO already. After three concert tours in Russia and a few documentaries about us, we actually have a very good reputation there,' said Victor. 'But it was the "how" and the "why" that really intrigued them,' he said. "'How is it that an orchestra like the SBO can keep Russian folk music culture alive so far from Russia – in a country like Australia, with little history of Russian culture, and to such a high standard?'"

'Audience members asked: "'How is it that you only have five Russian speakers in the orchestra? How do you get so many different nationalities to join a Russian folk orchestra? Why is it that you have no generous sponsors, and how come none of the musicians are paid?'" Somehow they just could not compute that musicians might turn up for rehearsal once a week just for the love of playing this music, without being paid! To them, this was unbelievable,' said Victor.

There were additional questions about the availability of Russian folk instruments. 'They were much amused,' laughed Victor, 'about Matt Morgan, our left-handed domra player. There is no concept of "left handed" instruments in Russia. If you are left-handed – tough! Of course there is, in Australia, which is why we got one of Russia's master luthiers in Moscow to make a prima-domra "leftie" for Matt. They were amazed at that,' he said.

'But what really held them spellbound,' said Millie, 'was the video clip, a montage of some of the orchestra's more celebrated musical performances. They clapped and cheered afterwards. They were so impressed,' she said. 'But what is of real interest to them,' added Victor, 'is that people living down here in what's to them the bottom of the world, are keeping Russian culture alive. It really delights them.'

We understand that the organisers of this festival in Moscow were so impressed with Victor's presentation, that next time they would prefer that he bring the whole Sydney Balalaika Orchestra with him, so they can hear us for real.

Will it happen soon?

Well..... just maybe!

