



SYDNEY BALALAIKA ORCHESTRA

NOVOSTI

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Back to the Bush – 30 March 2019 – Putty



Prima domra soloist Tanya Jephtha warming up in Putty

It was Saturday the 30th March that the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra (SBO) went bush again. This is an SBO “biennale”. Every two years, a convoy of vehicles travels up the Putty Road to a tiny little valley far from the “madding crowd”.

This is one of our favourite destinations to give a concert, tuck into some of the local food and sing round a campfire, though not necessarily in that order – and it’s all organised by Martha Babineau, part-time Putty resident and second domra player.

It’s not often that the musicians face their food before they “face the music”, but that is *de rigueur* in Putty and the same applies to the concert-goers; and a wonderful feast it was too. ‘You can’t expect people to spend a couple of hours driving up a twisting road to our little valley without feeding them,’ said Martha. ‘And we always finish off with a good campfire!’ she said.

So where does the audience come from? ‘From Sydney of course,’ said SBO president, Bruce Barker. ‘Though I did meet some people who came all the way from Newcastle. It was a long way to come but they loved it,’ he said.

The intimate nature of such a concert, when the audience is almost within touching distance of the instruments, is very appealing. The SBO’s instruments are very different from those that audiences are used to. During the interval people have a chance to get a closer look. ‘Between numbers, I nearly always ask the musicians to show their instruments and sometimes play something on them. It helps the audience to appreciate the different sounds they make,’ said musical director, Victor Serghie. ‘Occasionally, people are interested enough to ask about joining us,’ he said.

‘The reason I love playing here is because there is no amplification,’ said bass domra player, Patrick O’Neill. ‘In my army days when I was running the Unit’s rock group, I acquired an abiding dislike for the whine of electric guitars. That’s why I love these instruments. They’re at their best when heard acoustically. You can’t do that in a larger hall. Here the only amplifier is for the singer.’

And after the concert, as evening turned to night and campfire embers glowed, the sound of domras and guitars were heard tinkling through the bush as the SBO unwound. This time our audience were the wombats and possums of the Putty valley, and of course the giant Putty moths!



CONCERTS

UPCOMING

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

19 October 2019 - Burrawang

November 2019 - Washington DC & Wisconsin, USA Tour

For details please refer to our website

www.balalaika.com

To Springwood with Love – 7 April 2019

On 7th April, the SBO gave its second concert at the Blue Mountains Theatre which is part of the Blue Mountains Community Hub precinct. The Hub opened recently (in March 2015) and its theatre is one of the best the orchestra has played in. It was a good audience on a perfect autumn day.

Unlike in Putty, this time the orchestra definitely needed amplification and the sound engineers did a great job. The need for amplification is more determined by balance than overall sound output. Accordions and bayans (Russian button accordions) can otherwise be overwhelmingly loud.

The concert started with a rendition of *In the Village*, an orchestral piece based on a number of traditional Russian folk tunes followed by a number of Russian folk songs, sung by our singer, Sophia Markovtzev. These included *The Slender Rowan Tree*, *I'm Flying over Russia*, and the song made popular by Mary Hopkin and the Australian group, The Seekers, *Those Were the Days*.

This song is actually based on a Russian romance *Дорогой длиною*, or *The Long Road* written at the beginning of the 20th century by Boris Fomin. It's about a love-struck young man travelling through the Russian countryside in a troika with its jingling sleigh bells. Sophia sang it in both English and Russian.



However, one song had little to do with Russia. The title of the concert was *From Russia with Love*. It was originally recorded in the 1960s by Matt Monro as the title song for the James Bond, Cold War blockbuster, *From Russia with Love*. Sophia Markovtzev ended her rendition of the song by laughingly saying, 'As you could hear, that was a typical Russian folk song!' and went on to introduce *Kadril'*, a song of the unforgettable, joyful square dance usually performed by two couples.

The audience was ecstatic and the SBO didn't get out of the theatre without performing an encore. This encore, *Venture Outside*, features a brief solo with a prima balalaika. Balalaika players are few and far between in Sydney, and bass domra player Patrick O'Neill is one of them. So if anyone is interested in learning how to play this most Russian of instruments, we are happy to receive recruits!

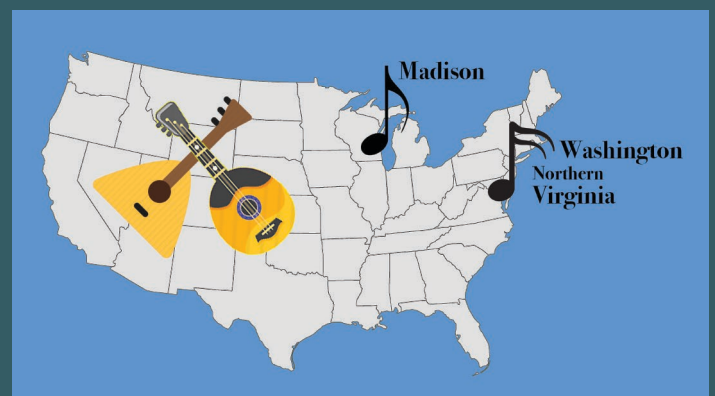
Sydney Balalaika Orchestra Plans U.S. Tour

In November 2019, the SBO will tour several locations in the United States, including Washington DC, Madison Wisconsin and Northern Virginia.

With around 60 musicians, the Washington Balalaika Society (WBS) is the largest Russian folk instrument orchestra in the United States. WBS President Jan Bohm is excited: 'Our conductor, Svetlana Nikonova, heard an SBO CD a while back and said "we must invite these folks to join and play with us in the U.S."'

The SBO will perform alongside the WBS in its Fall Concerts. At the invitation of the University of Wisconsin Russian Folk Orchestra the SBO will play jointly with that Orchestra on the University campus, and also present a concert to the Russian community in Northern Virginia.

Our excitement is mounting, and we will keep you informed as our preparations continue!



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.