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## Feature

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### Prose Poems: M Il'in and His Contribution to Soviet Children's Literature

By Jane Rosen

From its inception the Soviet Union was committed to the production of children's literature. The Deputy Commissar for Education, Nadezhda Krupskaya, stated that children's literature was "one of the mightiest weapons in socialist education of the new generation".<sup>1</sup>

Many gifted writers and illustrators were involved in the creation of this literature. All used their imagination and talents to produce books that were very different from children's books available before the Revolution.

From this creativity came a new type of children's book – the information book.

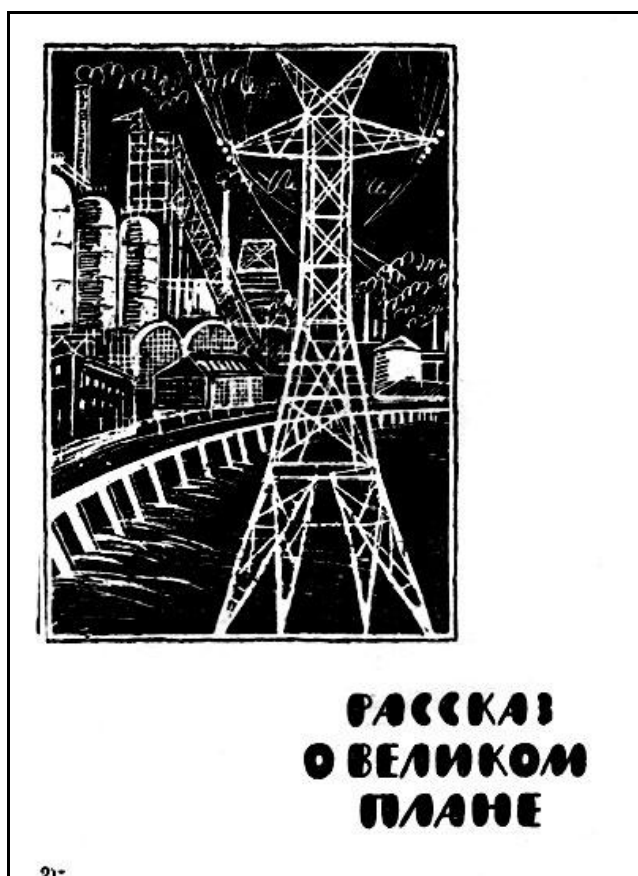
Although factual books were nothing new, the necessity of educating the population, including the 'new generation', to cope with the rapid advances in industry and agriculture required a new approach. Not only did the progress of mechanisation and new practices in farming need to be explained to the young, so did the planning of the new economic system. At this point a receptive and acute author entered the field.

M Il'in was the pseudonym of Il'ya Yakovlevich Marshak, the younger brother of the noted poet and translator Samuil Marshak. Born in 1895 and trained as an engineer, he was based in Leningrad and able to assist the older brother with his work in children's literature. He began his career in the field writing for the children's journal *Novy Robinson* from 1924, and published his first books in 1926. He produced several titles in the next few years. "Both brothers belong to a group of writers who are studying science and history and Soviet life and writing books not only for Russian children, but for workers in factories and for peasants."<sup>2</sup>

This last is important. These books, although primarily addressed to children, were read by adults as well. They are an engaging and clear exposition of the advances in Soviet society and science. They were written not only to explain, but also to inspire the reader to a realisation that the times they were living through, and contributing to, were times of wonder and of achievement.

*Rasskaz o velikom plane*, published in the Soviet Union in 1930, was translated into English under different titles by both US and British publishers. Both versions came

out in 1931, the British one known as *Moscow Has a Plan: A Soviet Primer* and the US version as *New Russia's Primer: The Story of the Five-Year Plan*. This was a highly political book that set out to explain the concept of a planned economy and to describe the immense efforts of the Soviet people to make the Five Year Plan a success. The translation of this text was valued in the West where information on the USSR was highly sought after and the appetite for details of the innovations in the social, economic and education systems was keen. The book was prized not only for the description that it contained, but also for the originality of its style and approach to the education of its readers: it "communicate[s] to children a breathless, value-laden excitement about the Great Plan".<sup>3</sup>



M Il'in's *Rasskaz o velikom plane* from *Izbrannye Proizvedeniya* (SCRSS Library)

The second book to appear in the West is the one arguably most redolent of this style. *Chernym po belomu*, was published in 1928 and translated as *Black on White: The Story of Books* in 1932. Il'in engages his readers in a dialogue on the subject of the history of

communication, presenting his ideas in vivid language, and introducing his audience to the deciphering of ancient languages, the processes of printing and the development of books as a permanent record of the knowledge of humankind.

Other translations of Il'in's works followed. Often he would begin with an ordinary object, one that was used on a daily basis, and take it back to its origins. In *100,000 Whys: A Trip Around the Room*, published in Britain in 1934, he does what the subtitle says. He takes the reader figuratively by the hand and walks around the room, pointing out the wonder of every mundane article. The first stop on the way is the tap and from this starting point he discusses (not lectures, he never lectures) the history of washing, waste pipes and sewage. By the time author and reader move on, they have discussed the engineering of the pipes and the science of washing, as well as the chemical make-up of soap and the biology of the human body.

In other works he looks at the history of time, the development of light and the progress of mankind. *Men and Mountains: Man's Victory Over Nature*, published in Britain in 1936, is probably the title that is most dated. It deals with the engineering of nature by the diverting of rivers and has the author declare that progress will mean the removal of the word desert from the maps. This we know now to be highly undesirable, but written in the 1930s this was part of the progress that the Soviet Union saw as desirable. It arose from the belief that scientific advancements were for the improvement of people's lives and not for commercial gain.

In general his books stand the test of time. His method of engaging the reader in conversation, constantly asking questions and making his audience think, the clarity of his explanations, and the impression that we are all on a voyage of discovery and can all contribute to the progress of science – all this remains as vivid today as it was in the 1930s. Gorky called his works "prose poems" and they are. He encourages the curiosity of the reader and ensures that this

curiosity will remain after the end of the book.



From M Ilyin & E Segal's *Do You Know?*, 1957, illustrated by D Borovsky, P Ossovsky, A Godov & O Shukhvostov (SCRSS Library)

There is little written on M Il'in in the West. There is a reason for this: his view of the Soviet Union is not a popular one here and never was. It was impossible to ignore the genius of his brother, but a little easier to ignore the engineer who could write so well

about the world that he would inspire generations of scientists.

Although most of the English translations before the Second World War were issued by Western publishers, the period of the Cold War ended this and he is barely mentioned in Western studies of Soviet children's literature. However, his books were republished often in the Soviet Union and were still being issued after the break-up of the USSR. *Sto tysyach pochemu* was released again in 2003.

<sup>1</sup> Balina, Marina (Ed): *Russian Children's Literature and Culture*, NY, Routledge, 2008, p 4

<sup>2</sup> Introductory notes to *Black on White* by M Il'in

<sup>3</sup> Henry, Jules: *A Cross Cultural Outline of Education* in *Current Anthropology*, Vol 1 No 4, July 1960, pp 267–305

*Jane Rosen is Librarian at the Imperial War Museum and former SCRSS Librarian. Outside of work she reviews children's books and researches radical and working-class children's literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

### Select Bibliography in English

Titles marked with an asterix (\*) are held in the SCRSS Library.

*By M Il'in:*

\* *100,000 Whys*

Translated by Beatrice Kinkead, London, George Routledge and Sons, 1933

*Black on White*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, Philadelphia / London, JB Lippincott, 1936

*How the Automobile Learned to Run*

New York, International Publishers, 1945

*The Little Citizen of a Big Country*

Moscow, Foreign Languages, 1939

*Men and Mountains*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, London, George Routledge and Sons, 1936

*Moscow Has a Plan*

Trans George S Counts & Nucia P Lodge,  
London, Jonathan Cape, 1931

*New Russia's Primer*

Trans George S Counts & Nucia P Lodge,  
Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1931

*Turning Night into Day*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, Philadelphia /  
London, JB Lippincott, 1936

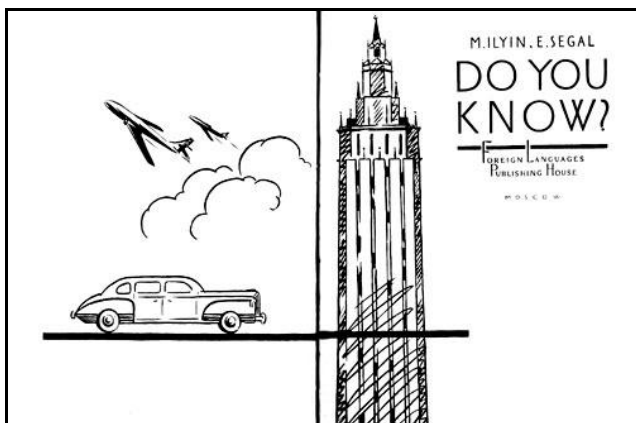
*What Time is It?*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, London, George  
Routledge and Sons, 1932

*By M Il'in in collaboration with E Segal:*

\* *Do You Know?*

Trans F Solasko, Moscow, Foreign  
Languages Publishing House, 1957



Title page of M Ilyin & E Segal's *Do You Know?*,  
1957 (SCRSS Library)

*Giant at the Crossroads*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, New York,  
International Publishers, 1948

*The Giant Widens His World*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, New York,  
International Publishers, 1949

*How Man Became a Giant*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, London, George  
Routledge and Sons, 1942

\* *A Ring and a Riddle*

Trans Beatrice Kinkead, London,  
Hutchinson, 1945

## SCRSS News

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### Next Events

**Friday 24 September 7pm**

**Lecture: Skryabin – Silver Age, Soviet Era, Present Day**

By Simon Nicholls. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Skryabin (1871–1915) was a composer and pianist of genius, a contemporary and colleague of Rachmaninov who preferred the company of poets and philosophers to that of other musicians. Skryabin's philosophy and its relation to his music caused controversy during the composer's lifetime and the Soviet era, and is still the subject of investigation. Simon Nicholls is a pianist and teacher, and has made regular visits to Russia to research the music. In this talk he looks at reactions to Skryabin over the last 95 years and gives musical illustrations.

**Friday 15 October 7pm**

**Illustrated Lecture: British Responses to Soviet Art in the 1940s**

By Christine Lindey. Christine is an art historian and lecturer. Her publications include *Art in the Cold War* (1990) and *Keywords in Nineteenth Century Art* (2006).

**Friday 26 November 7pm**

**Lecture: Baba Yaga in Brixton – The Children's Library at the SCRSS 1924–2010**

By Jane Rosen. Jane gives an illustrated talk on the Society's unique Children's Library, from its beginnings to the present. Jane is former SCRSS Librarian and has a research interest in radical and working-class children's literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (See Jane's article on page 1.)

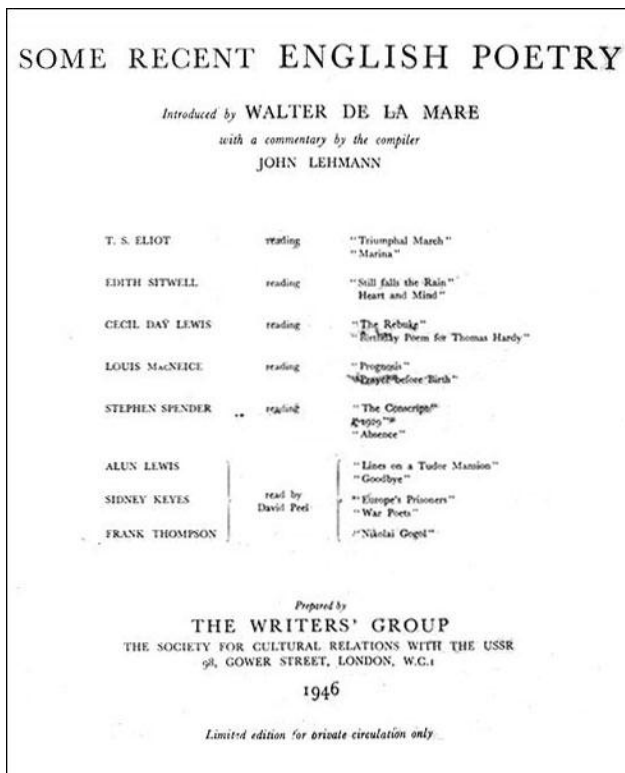
**Friday 10 December 6.30–9.00pm**

**Special Event: 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Defeat of Fascism in 1945**

**Tickets: £15.00 (SCRSS members only)**

We invite SCRSS members to join us in a special commemorative event that pays tribute to the Society's Anglo-Soviet cultural activities in WWII. This reception and special event, with the participation of

distinguished guests, forms part of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations to mark the defeat of Fascism in 1945.



Cover of the original SCR Writers' Group poetry recording, 1946 (SCRSS Archive)

The event takes place at the SCRSS premises and opens with a buffet and reception. Due to space restrictions admission will be by ticket only. Tickets cost £15.00 each and will be available to SCRSS members only.



JB Priestley, president of the SCR Writers' Group, celebrates his birthday backstage at the world premiere of *An Inspector Calls* at the Kamerny Theatre, Moscow, 1945 (SCRSS Archive)

The highlight of the evening will be the playing of a new CD version of a poetry recording made in 1946 by the SCR Writers' Group. The album recordings are introduced by Walter De La Mare and John Lehmann. They include readings of their own poems by Walter De La Mare, TS Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, as well as a reading by David Peel of poems by Alun Lewis, Sidney Keyes and Frank Thompson, who were killed in WWII. The album was presented to the Soviet Ambassador in February 1947 for passing to the Soviet Writers Union in tribute to the Soviet Union's contribution to the defeat of Fascism.

The evening will also include a visual presentation of the Society's recent photographic exhibition *Anglo-Soviet Cultural Exchanges 1941-1948*, together with images of its official opening at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg (see page 4, *SCRSS Information Digest Summer 2010 issue for report*). This exhibition, compiled from the SCRSS archives, was taken to St Petersburg in April 2010 by Jean Turner, SCRSS Hon Secretary, and Christine Lindey, SCRSS Council. It also included a visual history of the SCRSS's initiation of and support for the Southwark memorial to the Soviet dead of WWII.

For further details, please contact the SCRSS office by telephone on 020-7274-2282 in early November.

Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees for films and lectures: £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members). For all other events, see details above.

## Simplified Visa Procedure for 3-Day Visits – Pilot Scheme

On 14 July 2010 RIA-Novosti's daily news feed included a news item from *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* outlining a simplified visa procedure for tourists on three-day visits to Russia.

In May 2009 the Russian Parliament amended the law on entering and exiting the Russian Federation, allowing foreigners arriving at the seven large ports of Russia, including St Petersburg, to stay in Russia for three days without a visa. In St Petersburg this has led to a record number of tourists arriving by cruise ship, with a peak of 10,030 passengers on 13 July 2010. St Petersburg's Governor, Valentina Matviyenko, hopes to extend the practice to tourists arriving by air and her proposal for three-day, visa-free stays for foreign tourists arriving at Pulkovo Airport is currently being considered by the Ministry of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy. The head of the Ministry's Tourism and International Co-operation Department claims that, if the pilot is successful, it could be extended to the whole of Russia. The move has been welcomed by travel agencies, in particular, who hope that visa-free travel will make the job of attracting foreign tourists to Russia far easier.

## **Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News**

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### **Next Events**

**Sunday 14 November 12.30pm  
Event: Remembrance Sunday**

The next event at the Soviet War Memorial will be the Remembrance Sunday ceremony. If you are already on the SMTF mailing list, you will receive further details in early October. Alternatively, to receive information about this event, as well as next year's ceremonies on 27 January (Holocaust Day) and 9 May (Victory Day), please contact the Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, Email: [smtf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:smtf@hotmail.co.uk).

### **Volunteers**

Following the very well-attended ceremony on 9 May 2010, the SMTF would like to hear from anyone interested in helping at the

ceremonies at the Soviet War Memorial. We need people to help set up, act as stewards, assist veterans and so on. If you are willing to offer your services on 9 May (Victory Day) – or at any other SMTF event – please contact Ralph Gibson on 020-7370-3002 or via post / email (see details under Next Events above).

*The Soviet War Memorial is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum), Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ.*

## **Feature**

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### **Reflections on the Cicely Osmond Collection**

By Jill Cunningham

It has been my privilege over recent months to work on digitising and cataloguing the Cicely Osmond Collection, a unique collection that the SCRSS was lucky enough to receive as a bequest during the late 1980s. We don't possess too much concrete information about Cicely and her life, other than knowing that she was a teacher, socialist, keen Esperantist, and wrote Nature Notes in the *Daily Worker* during the 1950s. Nevertheless, the content and scope of her collection seems to reflect much of her personality and interests. At the same time its significance lies in the unique insight that it offers into important aspects of the history and development of the Soviet Union.

From the information we have, Cicely was something of a pioneer: she was one of the many people who took the opportunity to visit the Soviet Union during the early years of its existence, motivated by political conviction, simple curiosity or perhaps both. Cicely seems to have been active in socialist circles and, as an Esperantist and educationalist, was no doubt particularly keen to meet others of a similar persuasion. She visited the Soviet Union on a number of

occasions from the 1930s onwards, gathering a collection of tourist brochures, postcards, menus, metro tickets and maps, theatre programmes, invitations to concerts and photographs, all of which reflect the fascination of these early trailblazers.

Whilst her pictures from a 1960 visit are of the more conventional ‘tourist snap’ variety, two albums of photographs from visits in 1931 and 1935 are of particular interest. At a time of significant political and social transformation, Cicely’s albums offer us an insight into how such momentous changes shaped and impacted on the daily lives of the ordinary man, woman and child. A photograph showing a horse and cart standing in front of a gleaming new glass and concrete building seems to encapsulate the contradictions of a society in transition. Many of the images show people at work or rest – travelling, selling their wares at markets or even cooling off during a heat-wave. There are also photographs of workers’ flats, textile factories and factory schools. Others focus on economic change – we see collective farms at work with hay making featured alongside sparkling new milking sheds, and images of industrialisation along the Volga.



Collective farm near Kharkov (Cicely Osmond Collection, SCRSS Library)



Letter from N Serebrovskij to E Osmond, 1922 (Cicely Osmond Collection, SCRSS Library)

These pictures are augmented by the postcards and long letters that Cicely wrote home to her mother, describing her experiences and impressions. The collection also contains Cicely’s correspondence with friends and family over a long period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of it in Esperanto. There seems to be reasonably strong evidence that she was involved with socialist Esperanto groups who corresponded with other like-minded individuals throughout the world. This included enthusiastic correspondents in the new Soviet Union, until Stalin closed down the Soviet Esperanto Union in 1937 and imprisoned or executed many of the members. Again, the striking aspect of this are the insights from ordinary people into not only the events and changes that took place during the early years of the Soviet Union, but also the small and fascinating detail of their daily lives.

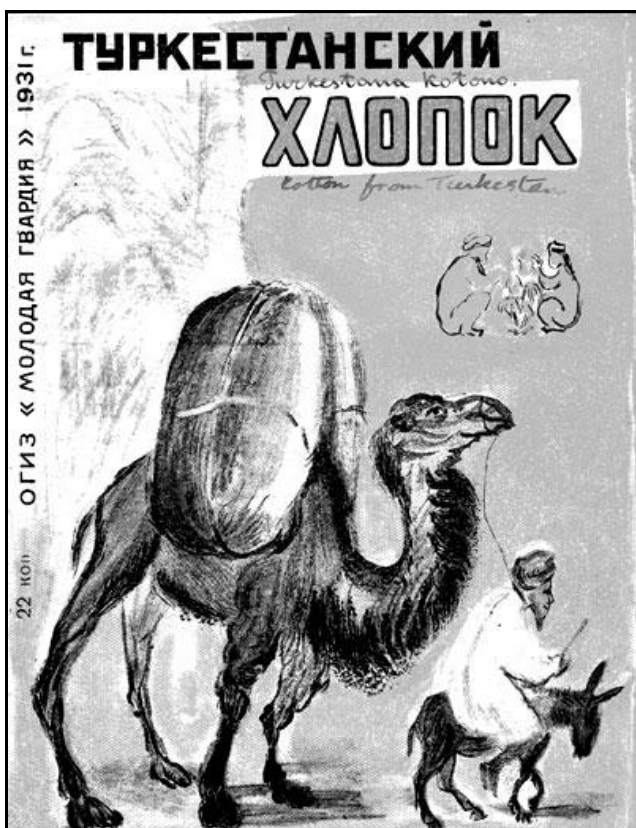
As a teacher and educationalist with a particular interest in biology, Cicely was keen to experience the new approaches to learning that were being introduced in the Soviet Union during its early years. It is the materials relating to children and education that form, perhaps, the central part of the collection. She took numerous photographs, collected many of the paperback books that became available for children during the late 1920s and 30s, and also brought back examples of children’s own work in the form of wall newspapers and posters. The books range from small puzzle and activity books – for example showing children how to use everyday items such as potatoes, matchsticks and feathers to make small

models – to early examples of classic works by the well-known children’s writer Samuil Marshak. These include *Pochta* (Post), illustrated by Mikhail Tsekhanovsky, which tells the story of a letter as it travels the world in search of its addressee. Another, *Pudel’* (The Poodle), is the amusing tale of a poodle which drives an old woman to distraction with its antics, in an edition beautifully illustrated with black and red line drawings by Vladimir Lebedev. One of the interesting aspects of the book collection is the fact that Cicely selected not only the more imaginative works being produced by some of the most talented writers and illustrators of the time, but also books that reflect the changing realities of Soviet society. *Volga* is a pictorial representation of the change from a primitive agricultural society to the industrial heartland that it was becoming in the 1930s. *Turkestan Cotton* features the process of cotton production in Turkestan, from sowing the seed to the cloth reaching the factory. For writers and educationalists at this time, such works were a vital part of the educative process, helping to acquaint children with their new world and all its responsibilities.



Boys on balance beam (Cicely Osmond Collection, SCRSS Library)

Education was of particular interest and fascination to many in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Forward-thinking teachers and educators sought to widen opportunity, as well as develop new methods and approaches. Indeed, this is an area in which the SCRSS had a strong connection through its Education Section. Chaired by well-known educationalists such as Beatrice King and Deana Levin, the Section organised a number of exhibitions relating to Soviet education. Cicely’s photographs and other material reflect the ways in which the Soviet Union at that time was at the forefront of such new developments. Pictures from pioneer camps show how outdoor activities and healthy living played an important part in child development. Girls, as well as boys, feature in many of the photographs and there is a strong emphasis on both work and leisure. Children are seen enjoying many outdoor activities, such as gardening and woodwork, as well as their books.



*Turkestan Cotton*, 1931 (Cicely Osmond Collection, SCRSS Library)

Wide-ranging in its scope, the Cicely Osmond Collection is a truly unique and irreplaceable resource that offers us personal insights into important periods of Soviet life and society.



*Jill Cunningham studied Russian at the University of Westminster and wrote her dissertation on 'Soviet Children's Poetry 1917–1941'. She is interested in children's literature and education, is a member of the SCRSS Council, and is currently helping to digitise and catalogue the Cicely Osmond Collection in the SCRSS Library.*

Note: The SCRSS is interested in hearing from anyone who may have further information on Cicely Osmond to add to our knowledge of her life or her collection.

## **Anniversary**

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### **On Chekhov's 150<sup>th</sup>**

By Rosamund Bartlett

Chekhov's birthday is usually a special event for the dozens of people who work at the museums dedicated to his memory dotted all over the former Soviet Union. This year, however, it was particularly special, for 2010 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. The celebrations began on Chekhov's birthday itself – 29 January (17 January according to the pre-revolutionary calendar). Residents of Chekhov's home town of Taganrog braved snow and freezing temperatures to bring cherry branches to lay at the foot of the statue which was put up outside the house where he was born 50 years ago. They were joined by President Dmitry Medvedev who was making his first visit to the city. In Yalta Declan Donellan's production of *Three Sisters* was performed at the city's newly restored theatre, and a ceremony was held in faraway Siberia on the Island of Sakhalin, which Chekhov visited in 1890, when he conducted a census of its penal colony. In Moscow, meanwhile, after a wreath was laid at Chekhov's grave, a gala performance launched a special 'Chekhov Days' festival, organised in addition to the regular Chekhov International Theatre Festival held each May.

The celebrations were not limited to Russia, as special events have been taking place

during 2010 throughout the world, from New South Wales to Mexico. Chekhov has always occupied a special place in the affections of the British and that was clear to see at the Hampstead Theatre in January, where the actor Michael Pennington and I presented a week of fund-raising performances which were completely sold out. It was heart-warming that so many distinguished figures in the theatrical and literary world were keen to give up their time to take part: all the proceeds, which were matched by a generous donation by Evgeny Lebedev, have gone towards the restoration of Chekhov's house in Yalta.

Good things happened when Ukraine became independent in 1991. It was refreshing when historians in Kiev started arguing that Russia was an offshoot of Ukrainian civilisation, rather than the other way around, and to be reminded that Gogol was as much Ukrainian as Russian. But there were also casualties of the new nationalist fervour, and Chekhov's 'house-museum' in Yalta was one of them. It was a mark of the house's special status that it was funded directly by the Ministry of Culture in Soviet times. But when the Soviet Union collapsed, so did its funding, as the house found itself marooned in a Ukraine which did not regard the financial support of a museum devoted to a Russian writer as a priority. The funds the museum now receives from the local authority are barely enough to pay the meagre salaries of its staff, but in the meantime the physical fabric of the house has been steadily deteriorating. With cracks appearing in the walls due to subsidence, and the ever-present threat of damp, the house has been in urgent need of restoration. With Chekhov regarded as the most important playwright of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is a cultural site of international importance, and it would be a tragedy for the house's precious exhibits to be put at risk.

By any standard the 'White Dacha' is worth preserving. It is the beautiful and evocative home Chekhov built for himself in 1899, when tuberculosis forced him to move from Moscow to the Crimea. He lived in it for the last five years of his life and, despite

becoming too ill to prune the roses he planted in the garden, he wrote some great masterpieces here, including *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and the story *The Lady with the Little Dog*. The house was home to Chekhov's mother, to his part-time actress-wife Olga Knipper, and to his sister Masha, who preserved its interior just as it was when her brother left it for the last time, and defended the house during the Nazi invasion. None of the museums founded in Chekhov's former homes in Russia can boast that. Until Ukraine has the equivalent of the National Trust, we all have a duty to support the museum's beleaguered staff in their quest to safeguard its future. We can also continue to hope that the governments of Russia and Ukraine will transcend whatever political differences have so far stopped them from embarking on a joint cultural project which would arouse the world's admiration, and prove that their high regard for their shared cultural legacy is not circumscribed by narrow nationalist concerns.

*Rosamund Bartlett is author of 'Chekhov: Scenes from a Life', editor of 'Chekhov: A Life in Letters', and translator of two Chekhov anthologies: 'About Love and Other Stories' and 'The Exclamation Mark'. She is Founding Director of the Anton Chekhov Foundation, set up to preserve Chekhov's house in Yalta (www.yaltachekhov.org).*

## **Reviews**

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**Freedom from Tyranny: The Fight Against Fascism and the Falsification of History**  
**By Phil Katz (Manifesto Press, 2010, ISBN 978-1-907464-03-4, £5.95, www.manifestopress.org.uk)**

On 18 December 2009 the UN General Assembly voted 127 to one to condemn the resurgence of neo-Nazism and neo-Fascism. It expressed its "deep concern

about the glorification of the Nazi movement and former members of the Waffen SS [...] as well as declaring, or attempting to declare, such members and those who fought against the anti-Hitler coalition and collaborated with the Nazi movements as participants in national liberation movements". It also noted with concern "recurring attempts to desecrate or demolish monuments erected in remembrance of those who fought against Nazism during the Second World War".

To their shame, the solitary vote against this resolution was the USA, while Britain abstained, along with other countries that were pro-Hitler in WWII. This was an act of historical betrayal of the Allied Forces of Britain, France, the USA and, in particular, the Soviet Union who sacrificed their lives for the defeat of Fascism, fighting alongside heroic partisan movements throughout the Nazi-occupied countries of Europe and against the Japanese invaders in the Far East.

Phil Katz has written this timely book to correct the revisionists of history who seek to equate Communism and the Soviet Union's actions before and during WWII with the crimes of Hitler's Germany.

This reactionary movement manifested itself in the *Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism* adopted in June 2008 by Conservative, Christian Democrat, Green and other MEPs, as well as former heads of state, for presentation to the European Parliament. A watered down version of the declaration was passed by the European Parliament in April 2009 and it was in response to this that the UN General Assembly took the vote mentioned above.

Copiously illustrated with images from the 1920s onwards – from the Marx Memorial Library's *Daily Worker* archive and other sources – this book shows how Western capitalist politicians connived with Mussolini, Franco and Hitler to crush countries such as Abyssinia and Spain and the mass anti-Fascist movements in Europe that stood in the way of their world domination.

The Soviet Union, well aware of the struggle to come but desperate to build up its industrial and agricultural infrastructure, tried every diplomatic initiative to delay the inevitable outcome, both in the League of Nations and through bi-lateral agreements.

Phil Katz deals in great detail with all the twists and turns of pre-WWII diplomacy, while reminding us that prior to 1941 the Soviet Union was also being attacked on its eastern seaboard by Japan, part of the Fascist Axis. When Japan was defeated and turned its attention to British colonies in India, Burma and Malaya, Soviet forces were crucially released to defend Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad, following the Nazi invasion of the USSR.

With the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory over Fascism being celebrated this year, it is clear that some governments are preparing to revert to the policies that led to the last war. Phil Katz has reminded us that the danger is real and anti-Fascist sacrifices must not be forgotten. The SCRSS can congratulate itself on being a founder of the memorial to the Soviet dead of WWII in Southwark, serving as it does as a reminder to future generations of the meaning of total war.

*Jean Turner*

**GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency**  
**By Richard J Aldrich (Harper Collins, 2010, ISBN 978-0-00-727847-3, Hbk, 666pp, illus, timeline, notes, bibliography, index, £30.00)**

This is a full-on academic study of the history, trials and tribulations of GCHQ from its origins in the Government Code and Cypher School (founded on 1 November 1919). The name GCHQ was originally an anonymous cover name for Bletchley Park, first used in late 1939, and only formally

adopted for the agency we now know on 1 November 1948.

The signals intelligence world contains many paradoxes and inherent problems, three of which are encryption, deep cover and tactical analysis. The first paradox is inherent in information gathering: how can one *use* information gathered from signals intelligence (sigint) without the enemy realising that his code has been broken? The problem is multiplied when one is in a military alliance where intelligence is (supposed to be) shared. It is easier to manage this situation if allies spy on each other, as I witnessed when working in Berlin. Briefing politicians is a further hazard to be avoided at all costs – if they blab, the source dries up, and this has happened several times. And if we create an 'unbreakable' code, do we give our allies a weaker version, keeping the stronger one for ourselves? Questions like these were a major concern for GCHQ in the early period, and help to explain its exclusivity and obsession with secrecy throughout most of its life.

Many people remember GCHQ in connection with the trade union ban. This was an example of the deep cover paradox which led to one of several disasters to hit GCHQ over the years. Because sigint workers worked under cover, they would naturally join trade unions in order to appear normal. The early 1980s was a time when both the British and American sigint communities were rocked with revelations of moles and defectors, the most notorious being Geoffrey Prime, arrested in 1982. The governments of Heath and Thatcher had damaged American goodwill and co-operation on intelligence, despite generous help from the Americans over the Falklands. The Americans now wanted the polygraph introduced and unions abolished, and Mrs Thatcher, partly because of her own prejudices and against all advice, made a solo decision on a union ban. The conflict, which ran from 1984–1997, resulted in the agency losing half of its Higher Executive Officer computer experts in 1984–5. The contrast between praising Polish Solidarity, while stamping out unions at home, was too

much. Others commented that the real problem was government pay policies, and the lack of investment which made it difficult to do the job. At any rate, as a result of this imposed and unnecessary conflict, GCHQ was demoralised, its work was hindered, its cover was decisively blown, and it has been in the limelight ever since.

The third major problem certainly outranks anything discussed so far: this is the tactical use of intelligence. During the Cold War my colleagues and I as sigint operators in Berlin (having never heard of GCHQ) worked ceaselessly on establishing and charting the Warsaw Pact order of battle. As befits our stated policy of deterrence, each side presented to the other various forms of impressive hardware and made fake attacks to provoke reactions. Tactical military use of sigint was the name of the game. The Russian long-range air force would come out, circle Berlin, and return, our side had time to track and react. When it came to strategic intelligence, on the other hand, British intelligence did not score well: it failed to predict the occupation of Czechoslovakia (1968), the Arab-Israeli war (1973), the fall of the Shah of Iran (1979) or the Falklands War (1982). What warnings there were, were disregarded by our political masters.

Now, as Aldrich says in his final chapters, we are in a totally different world. Sigint has expanded into the civilian world in so many different forms that practical tactical use has become very, very difficult. 2.8 million emails per second and 30 billion texts per year are sent in Britain alone, and the security services are swamped with information. In retrospect, we know that we tracked the Omagh bombers' mobiles as they approached their target, picked up the 'open fire' signal to the Libyan People's Bureau (resulting in the death of PC Yvonne Fletcher), and saw the final messages between the hijackers on 10 September 2001, but, probably, in only one of those cases could we have averted the tragedy – Yvonne Fletcher. There is a serious problem with converting 'big-picture' sigint information into timely action, although

short-range surveillance of suspects is now easily achieved.

I have chosen to write of some of the paradoxes of intelligence, rather than attempt to summarise the history of sigint and the development of GCHQ. For this history in all its complexities you need to consult the book. The book is a re-make of British history from the underside, re-visiting all the wars Britain has fought as she has given up her Empire, recounting spectacular successes and hidden disasters. We helped the American services a lot in the early years, and they generously repaid that debt during the Falklands war. The damage done by Heath and Thatcher has been patched up and maybe the US has been kinder to us than we deserve. Russia is ever present in the background but to me nothing startlingly new is revealed. There are technical details about naval and air reconnaissance, descriptions of civil service and political infighting and deception, and unexpected revelations: for example, the real reason why Roberto Calvi was found hanged under Blackfriars Bridge is to be found on page 407. There are surprising revelations about huge enterprises of which ordinary UK citizens (myself included) have never heard. The narrative is written in a cogent, racy style with the author commenting on events as they unfold. This is, all in all, a good read for those who wish to catch up on the real history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Andrew Jameson*

*Andrew worked in signals intelligence at RAF Gatow, Berlin, in the early 1960s and later lectured in Russian Studies at Essex, Portsmouth and Lancaster Universities.*

## **My Perestroika**

*My Perestroika* is a new film currently sweeping the festival circuit in America. I came across it on Facebook where it has already gained a substantial following. Director Robin Hessman, like many of us, became a Russophile in college and in her subsequent travels. In her film she depicts the lives of ordinary Russians. While it is yet

to be shown in the UK, you can find a teaser clip on YouTube. From this you can see it is a captivating blend of original material, home movies and oral testimonies.

Watching the clip reminded me of Gerry Clarke's exhibition, so successfully presented at the Society this year, which depicted the life of his late wife Sheila and her Russian friends in art, family snapshots and the exchange of letters over decades. The film spans almost the same epoch, from Soviet childhood to the end of the Soviet Union in teenage years, then adult lives in post-Soviet Russia.

It's been amazing reading on Facebook of the sell-out screenings in New York. At one, the audience apparently burst spontaneously into song! Equally intriguing have been the enticingly named venues (the KGB bar, the Russian Vodka Room and the Pravda restaurant) which have hosted the après-film rendezvous and discussions.

*My Perestroika* will be at the Sheffield DocFest (3–7 November). Hopefully, soon after it will be in London and elsewhere in the UK, when we can see for ourselves what has made this film such a success.

Charles Stewart

**Everything Flows**  
**By Vasily Grossman (trans. Robert & Elizabeth Chandler with Anna Aslanyan, Harvill Secker, 2010, ISBN: 978-1-846-55236-6, Hbk, 304pp, £16.99)**

"Through looking on his victim as less than human he (*the executioner*) becomes his own executioner; he executes the human being inside himself."

*Everything Flows* is one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most powerful and illuminating books, here brilliantly translated and annotated by Robert Chandler.

In contrast to Grossman's better-known *Life and Fate*, the story in *Everything Flows* is

simple. Ivan Grigoryevich returns to Moscow and St Petersburg after almost 30 years in the camps. He meets relatives and former colleagues, amongst them the man who denounced him. He then moves to a small town and finds a lover, Anna Sergeevna. But it is the extremity and moral complexity of the world through which the characters move that distinguishes this book. Grossman explores the psychology of a nation devouring itself. In showing the various types of 'Judas' who betrayed their fellows, he asks for understanding, not judgement. "They were subject to billion-ton pressures – and no one among the living is innocent."



Vasily Grossman (SCRSS Library)

Unusually and probably uniquely among male Soviet writers, Grossman focuses on life for women prisoners in the gulag. Ivan Grigoryevich concludes that "in the camps of Kolyma, men were not equal to women. Men, really, had it easier".

Grossman's daughter, Yekaterina Korotkova-Grossman, writes in an afterword that she has always thought the two chapters on the terror famine "are the most powerful in all Grossman's work". Anna

describes what she witnessed as chairman of a collective farm during 1932–3. Activists who seized grain from the villagers were told that the starving peasants would be fed by the state. They chose to believe this, yet it was a lie. A few children managed to crawl past police guards (placed to prevent the starving from reaching the towns), but they died on the streets, some of them kicked into the gutter by those who had already lost their humanity. Some died with food beside them, dropped by passers-by. They were too close to death even to see it.

Later chapters digress into lengthy essays on Lenin and Stalin – remarkable for their time, but they unbalance the structure of the work. Grossman died in 1964 while still revising the book.

*Everything Flows* is a beautiful and passionate appeal to humanity, an appeal for understanding of those who committed the vilest acts, without condoning those acts. While parts of the book are almost too painful to read, it is a profoundly humane work. In his portrayal of some of the darkest areas of the human psyche, Grossman illuminates the internal processes that make of us saints or Stalins. And it is only through such understanding that we can free ourselves from a world of victims and executioners.

Caroline Walton

Caroline is a translator and author of books on Russia ([www.russianenglishtranslation.org.uk](http://www.russianenglishtranslation.org.uk))

## **Filming the Unfilmable: Casper Wrede's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich***

**By Ben Hellman and Andrei Rogachevskii (ibidem-Verlag, Stuttgart, 2010, ISBN 978-3-8382-0044-6, Pbk, 250pp, col illus, 34.90 euros, available from [www.ibidem-verlag.de](http://www.ibidem-verlag.de))**

Casper Wrede's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1970) is one of those films that

seem to have fallen through the cracks. It was hard to get into production and, though it was well received when first released, it is rarely shown on television and is not available on DVD. In this new book Hellman and Rogachevskii use just about every scrap of evidence, including Wrede's extensive private archive, to do an almost forensic job of figuring out why that might be.

Solzhenitsyn was wary of film adaptations of his work, though parts of his novels are written in screenplay form and he even wrote some – so far – unproduced scripts. In any event a Soviet adaptation became unlikely when, surprisingly quickly after publication, he fell out of favour. At the same time, as screenwriter Ronald Harwood observed, an action-free film without a love story made it less than attractive to Hollywood.

But Wrede was determined and, with Harwood and his star Tom Courtenay, he spent two years making the film. In creating the laceratingly realistic feel they had invaluable help from author and former artist Mikhail Demin, himself a gulag victim: his sketches often became *de facto* set designs. Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist (a regular with Ingmar Bergman) and Norwegian composer Arne Nordheim also played vital roles. Everyone was encouraged by Wrede – and given the harsh conditions in northern Norway where the film was shot, they needed it – but none more so than Courtenay. He lost weight and, not for the first time, had dental work especially for the role – in this case removing the caps from two previously removed teeth.

But before tackling the film's progress, Hellman and Rogachevskii survey Wrede's pre-*One Day* career. He was born in Karelia in 1929 and soon afterwards his family moved to what is now Vyborg, then Helsinki. In 1950 he enrolled at the Old Vic Theatre School and then directed on stage and television.

Preparing for *One Day*, he and Harwood pored over the book separately, after which

they compared notes, only to find that each had found almost every word to be vital!

From here Hellman and Rogachevskii closely follow the film's production – at some points even turning detective, using Wrede's airline tickets to pursue him across Europe. Next follows a comparison of the script and the finished film. These can vary tremendously but there are only a few deviations, so carefully was the film planned. The authors spend some time considering these.

Then follow the film's reception and extensive excerpts from reviews. Here we begin to get an inkling of the difficulties. Its uncompromising approach to the difficult subject matter made it a film that some critics liked but found hard to recommend unreservedly. Moreover, it was occasionally overshadowed by political concerns – Wrede's native Finland, guessing that it was not intended to be understood as entirely historical, banned it.

However, when the doubtful author finally saw it in 1974, he wrote a gracious letter expressing satisfaction and blaming its short life in cinemas on "care-free Europe [...] not yet capable of empathising with a great tragedy". Later he became more critical. His own scripts are detailed to the point of almost precluding any contribution from the crew and actors, and he may have found it difficult to imagine *One Day* in any other way than his own.

Part of the publisher's *Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* series, the book is admirably produced with an extensive bibliography and 40 illustrations covering everything from set designs and behind the scenes shots to Wrede's coat of arms. It also publishes for the first time two essays by Wrede: *Russia on my Mind*, a memoir covering the years 1938–93, and *Letter to a Young Actor*. Perhaps a few of the 524 footnotes could have been integrated into the text but wherever they sit, they are another valuable contribution.

Wrede's film is important – for a long time the only film adaptation of Solzhenitsyn's

work and often moving. Hellman and Rogachevskii's book is a valuable reminder and hopefully will encourage more interest.

*John Riley*

## Feature

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### Brest Fortress in Belarus

By Russell Porter

This year the Society has hosted a photographic exhibition of Brest Fortress and screened the 1956 film *Immortal Garrison*, based on a screenplay by Konstantin Simonov. It was through the medium of this film that the heroism of the fortress's defenders was first brought to the notice of the general public in the Soviet Union. By then the great victories at Stalingrad, Kursk and Berlin had, of course, become legend, but the catastrophe of the first year of the war tended to be shrouded in humiliation and shame. However, this overlooked the fact that from the first day resistance to the German invasion had often been fierce, albeit if seemingly unavailing.



Detail of P Krivonogov's painting *The Defenders of Brest Fortress* (Brest Fortress Museum)

Brest Fortress plays a significant role in the historiography of the Great Patriotic War. While it ended in a crushing defeat, it is viewed in a manner not entirely dissimilar to that of our own Dunkirk: it revealed a spirit and tenacity which in more auspicious

circumstances would pave the way to ultimate victory.

The fortress was originally built as a response to Napoleon's invasion of 1812. By 1914 it had become the largest fortress in Tsarist Russia and, arguably, one of the largest fortresses in Europe.

It became the site for the first battle on the Eastern Front in WWII when it was attacked at dawn on Sunday 22 June 1941. The defences by this time were somewhat outdated, while the garrison consisted only of 3,500 largely support troops who were on a peace-time footing when attacked. It being a weekend, the fortress was also filled with the families of garrison members who were customarily allowed to visit their husbands, fathers and boyfriends at that time. The Germans cut the fortress off in the first few hours of the attack, resulting in many civilians with young families also being trapped inside. There are many reports of women fighting alongside their menfolk and of children aiding the defenders by bringing ammunition and food to their positions.

The German plan was to take the fortress in eight hours. In the event it took them over a month, fighting from room to room and cellar to cellar in a manner which would be played out on a much larger scale at Stalingrad over a year later. The Germans allocated a fully equipped infantry division, the 45<sup>th</sup>, for the fortress's capture, supported by additional specialist engineering units. It is a sobering thought that the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had spent the previous autumn and winter in Belgium earmarked for the invasion of Britain. At dawn on 22 June a massive artillery barrage, followed by repeated air strikes, began the assault on the fortress. However, it was not until the end of July that organised resistance at the fortress was finally broken, although isolated soldiers or groups of men continued to hold out even. The Germans finally resorted to the use of flame throwers and the flooding of some of the underground areas to eradicate any continued resistance. On 26 August 1941 Hitler brought Mussolini to view his triumph, accompanied by Goering, von Ribbentrop and Field Marshal Kesselring.

The fortress was recaptured on 28 July 1944 in the latter phase of Operation Bagration, the Soviet summer offensive that brought about the liberation of Belarus and the destruction of German Army Group Centre. The battle lasted for two whole days. The area had been turned into a fortified sector with three lines of defence, including barbed wire and minefields, with the fortress as a strong point. The Nazis tried to consolidate their position on the outer ring of the fortifications, but the Red Army battered them out, suffering many casualties in the process, especially due to the minefields. Unable to contain the pressure, the Germans were forced to withdraw.



Surrender of a group of wives and children of garrison members, together with some of the female medical staff, July 1941 (Brest Fortress Museum)

After the war, priority was, of course, given to rebuilding the city of Brest. By 1945 its population had fallen to less than one third of its pre-war level. In 1941 some 40% of the population had been Jewish, but most of these were killed in the autumn of 1942. Many people had been deported to work as slave labour in Germany, while others had



fled into the forests to escape Nazi persecution or join the partisans.

Eventually the ruins of the fortress were cleared of mines, some of the buildings restored and in 1956 a museum was established on the site. On 8 May 1965, in recognition of the heroic defence of the fortress, it was designated a *Hero Fortress of the Soviet Union*. In fact, it is the only *Hero* fortress, as all the other 12 locations given the distinction of *Hero* status are cities. At a ceremony in 1971 a memorial complex was inaugurated in the former citadel area of the fortress. This memorial complex has today been accorded the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

*Russell Porter has organised the Brest Fortress Exhibition in the UK. See page 19 in the Listings for details of autumn venues or visit [www.brestfortressinuk.co.uk](http://www.brestfortressinuk.co.uk) for more information.*

## Anniversary

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### Marius Petipa

By Tony Devereux

July 14 (1 July OS) marked a hundred years since the death of Marius Petipa, the 'Russian Frenchman' whose contribution to ballet is unsurpassed.

Petipa was born in Marseilles on 11 March 1818 to a theatre family supposedly descended from the Paris Opera artist Mademoiselle Petit Pas. His earliest performances were in various European countries and America. In May 1847 he arrived in St Petersburg for an engagement with the Imperial Theatres. He stayed and became naturalised.

He turned to choreography, the first of his 76 ballets being *Paquita*. For a long time he was secondary to Parisian choreographers who periodically worked in Russia, but when late in life his career took off, he eclipsed

them and propelled the Maryinsky Ballet to world pre-eminence.



Marius Petipa (SCRSS Library)

Many balletomanes regard Petipa's supreme achievement as *Sleeping Beauty*, created in January 1890 at nearly 72, coupled with *Swan Lake*, 1895, for which he created the first and third acts. This view was realistic 50 years ago when these ballets were newly enshrined in our own national ballet repertoire. We believed that Dame Ninette de Valois had rescued all that was best from Russia's revolutionary chaos.

Today, however, we see ever more Petipa ballets. Some never left the stage in the closed world of Soviet Russia. Others are owed to the Russians' admirable enthusiasm for reviving their legacy.

*La Bayadere*, chosen by the Paris Opera to commemorate the centenary, now rivals – if not exceeds – *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* in popularity. Others are *Don Quixote*, *Raymonda*, *The Pharaoh's Daughter* and *Le Corsaire*. The list will grow. Petipa's contribution to his art began earlier and ranged further than realised.

No comprehensive Petipa biography exists. Here his life is always summarised with

exaggerated emphasis on problems of the last years.

But the supposed fiasco of *The Magic Mirror*, 1903, is put in proper perspective by Fyodor Lopukhov, his post-revolutionary successor: although it was received on bayonets by St Petersburg balletomanes, it went down well in Moscow where it was revived in 1921.

His friction with the Director of the Imperial Theatres arose partly because the latter, newly appointed and finding a chief ballet-master in his mid-80s and failing health, prioritised replacing him. The inevitable hostilities have, unfortunately, been allowed to obliterate the more relevant issue of his private life.

His three marriages produced a theatrical dynasty of nine children. Three of five daughters were once appearing simultaneously at the Maryinsky. Sadly, the most talented, Yevgenia, died before reaching the professional stage, a shock which triggered the nervous disease pemphigus from which he never fully recovered.



Swan Lake (SCRSS Photo Library)

The eldest daughter Maria was a brilliant character dancer but not the classical ballerina of his dreams. His ambitions ultimately turned on Vera, the youngest. Again, tragedy struck. It was the collapse of her health in 1907 that caused his precipitate exit from St Petersburg – nothing to do with the Director. The family removed

to Gurzuf in the Crimea where Petipa died three years later, at 92. Vera fortunately recovered.

Under Petipa the Maryinsky nurtured the most brilliant period in ballet history, and became the springboard for the Pavlova and Diaghilev companies. Some claimed his art was outdated, but it was the leader of the avant-garde, Diaghilev himself, who paid the tribute of reviving *Sleeping Beauty*, as *Sleeping Princess*, in London in 1921. Today it is the signature work of our Royal Ballet.

## Listings

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### Art & Photography

#### Victoria & Albert Museum, South Kensington

Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL, Tel: 020-7942-2000, Web: [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

25 September – 9 January 2011: *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes – 1909–1929*. Daily 10am–5.45pm; Fridays 10am–10pm. Tickets: £10 adults; £8 seniors; £6 students, 12–17 year olds, ES40 holders; free to V&A Members.

This major autumn exhibition explores the world of the influential artistic director Serge Diaghilev and the most exciting dance company of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev imaginatively combined dance, music and art to create 'total theatre'. A consummate collaborator, he worked with Stravinsky, Chanel, Picasso, Matisse and Nijinsky. Diaghilev's dramatic performances transformed dance, reawakening interest in ballet across Europe and America. Celebrating the company's key period of activity, the exhibition reveals Diaghilev's enduring influence on 20<sup>th</sup>-century art, design and fashion. It includes more than 300 objects (giant theatre cloths, original costumes, set designs, props and posters) by artists and designers such as Leon Bakst, Georges Braque and Natalia Goncharova. These tell the story of a company that began in the social and

political upheaval of pre-revolutionary Russia and went on to cause a sensation with exotic performances that had never been seen before.

## Brest Fortress Exhibition

Web: [www.brestfortressinuk.co.uk](http://www.brestfortressinuk.co.uk)

See Russell Porter's feature *Brest Fortress in Belarus* (page 15).



German soldiers hunting down and eliminating the last handful of garrison defenders, July 1941 (Brest Fortress Museum)

20–23 September 2010:

Nottingham Society of Artists Gallery  
71/73 Friar Lane, Nottingham NG1 6DH  
1–12 November 2010:

The Civic  
Hanson Street, Barnsley, Yorks S70 2HZ

February 2011 (TBC):

Pushkin House  
5A Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2TA,  
Tel: 020-7269-9770, Web:  
[www.pushkinhouse.org/en](http://www.pushkinhouse.org/en)  
Exhibition talk by Larisa Bubik, Deputy Director of the Brest Fortress Museum. The event is being planned in conjunction with the Great Britain Russia Society, but is not yet confirmed. See the Pushkin House and Brest Fortress Exhibition websites for more information later in 2010.

## Events

### Sutton Russian Circle

Friends Meeting House, 10 Cedar Rd,  
Sutton SM2 5DA

Friday 17 September 7pm: Film *Pushkin's Moscow*, followed by a lecture by Michael

Jones on his book *The Battle for Moscow 1941–1942: Hitler's First Defeat*.

Friday 8 October 7pm: Film: *Khanty-Mansi People – Indigenous Minority of Siberia*, followed by a concert of Russian classical music by Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky. Piano: Oles Klok, Violin: Sofia Yatsyuk, accompanied by Larysa Khmurych.

## Film

### 54<sup>th</sup> BFI London Film Festival

Web: [www.bfi.org.uk/lff/](http://www.bfi.org.uk/lff/)

13–28 October 2010. Check website for details.

### 4th Russian Film Festival

Apollo Cinema, 19 Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus, London. Tel: 0871 220 6000 (Box Office), Web: <http://academia-rossica.org/en/film/russian-film-festival/4th-russian-film-festival>

29 October–7 November. Organised by Academia Rossica, the festival includes new award-winning films (features, documentaries and animation, all with English sub-titles), Q&As with directors and actors. Check website for details.

## Russian Language

### Russian Language Evening Classes

Civil Service Recreation Centre, 1 Chadwick Street, Westminster, London SW1P 2EP, Email: [charles0207@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:charles0207@yahoo.co.uk)  
Russian language classes at four levels. Tuesday and Thursday evenings, starting on 14 and 16 September 2010.

## Space Flight

### YuriGagarin50

Web: [yurigagarin50.org](http://yurigagarin50.org).

Contacts: Dr Chris Welch (Chair), Email: [c.welch@yurigagarin50.org](mailto:c.welch@yurigagarin50.org); Anita Heward, (Manager / Press Officer), Tel: 07756 034243, Email: [events@yurigagarin50.org](mailto:events@yurigagarin50.org)

YuriGagarin50 is a campaign to celebrate the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first

human space flight and the achievements of UK and Russian space flight over the past 50 years.



Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin at an SCR garden party in his honour, Kensington Square, London, 1961

It was launched in June 2010 by Dr Helen Sharman OBE, Britain's first astronaut who spent seven days on the Mir Space Station in 1991. Dr Sharman said: "After his historic flight, Yuri Gagarin was given the international crown for inspiration and wherever he went people thronged in the street to see him. On my last night in space, reflecting on my time, I realised that being away from Earth reinforced what my Russian friends had told me on the ground – what's important is personal relationships and what people can do together. Space is grand and being part of it makes people feel grand."

Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space and first person to orbit the Earth on 12 April 1961. YuriGagarin50 aims to encourage activities around the anniversary on 12 April 2011 and raise awareness of the legacy of Gagarin's flight. Dr Chris Welch, Chair of YuriGagarin50 commented: "Space is an inspirational subject and human space flight in particular has motivated many young people to follow careers in science and engineering. Gagarin's legacy touches many areas of our lives today; many people are unaware of how many applications

space has in modern life and the important contribution space makes to the UK economy. In particular, space plays a vital role in the environmental monitoring of our planet. Yuri Gagarin was the first person to see the Earth from space and was struck by its beauty, its fragility and humanity's duty to protect it."

The YuriGagarin50 website ([yurigagarin50.org](http://yurigagarin50.org)) has a searchable calendar of events planned to celebrate the anniversary, including exhibitions, talks and hands-on activities. In the run-up to the anniversary further information will be included on Yuri Gagarin, his visit to the UK in July 1961, and current space activities in the UK and Russia. A *Rockets for Yuri* initiative will also encourage the public to take part in a mass launching of air and water-powered rockets at locations across the UK at 12pm on 12 April 2011 to celebrate Gagarin's flight.

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