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Feature

An Englishman at Russian National Unity Day, 4 November 2006

By Andrew Jameson, Member of the Presidium of MAPRYAL

Russian National Unity Day is a new holiday, founded only in 2005. Its function is partly to replace the October Revolution celebrations, but my guess is that the Germanophile Russian president has also been inspired by the Day of German Unity (3 October), just as the recently introduced Russian Federation Council resembles the German Bundesrat.

The main invitees to the event were Russians from previous waves of emigration, Russians who uphold Russian culture abroad and at home, and academics of all nationalities who teach Russian worldwide. While (mostly) undeserving of this honour myself, I was invited because I am a member of the Presidium of MAPRYAL (International Association of

Teachers of Russian Language and Literature). Other members of MAPRYAL also attended, including Lyudmila Verbitskaya, Rector of St Petersburg University. This allowed us to hold useful discussions on the forthcoming MAPRYAL congress in Varna in September 2007.

Unity Day demonstrations had been promised by both Russian nationalists and Russian anti-fascists at various places in southern Moscow, but, apparently, there were no serious disturbances. The celebration of Unity Day took place in the Grand Kremlin Palace, reached through an unassuming entrance in the main Kremlin square. Ascending a long red carpeted stair to the staterooms, we first entered a narrow anteroom with malachite pillars and portraits of Russian princes and tsars from Rurik to Nicholas II. This opened into St Andrew's Hall, a vast space decorated in white and gold with huge chandeliers. Apparently, in Soviet days this had been a conventional party meeting space, but has now been restored to its former glory.

After assembling, we moved from St Andrew's Hall into St George's Hall to be seated at tables. MAPRYAL members were dispersed among the 300 guests. I was seated between a French emigré and the director of a Russian theatre in Lithuania on a table close to the President. My MAPRYAL colleague Renate Belenchikova, a German native, discovered she was seated next to Mr Putin. Although she wouldn't comment on their conversation later, except to say that his German was excellent, we did see the two laughing together during the dinner, so she was not too intimidated.

At two o'clock Mr Putin entered from St

Andrew's Hall, gave a speech of welcome and thanked us all for our work in disseminating Russian language and culture. Unity Day celebrates the moment when invaders were expelled and the Time of Troubles ended. In an innocent yet revealing phrase, Mr Putin praised Minin and Pozharsky's "national home guard that put an end to the troubles and returned law and order to our land". Does Mr Putin see himself as doing the same? He also made the first announcement that 2007 was to be the Year of the Russian Language. The speech is available at www.kremlin.ru in Russian and English with audio and video downloads. After his speech the President presented awards for the development of Russian language and culture abroad and my MAPRYAL colleagues from China, India, Slovakia and Ukraine were honoured.

Mr Putin's speech was followed by a concert. The new wonder pianist Denis Matsuev played with bravura, two singers sang romances and there was a performance by a Russian folk group made up of former pupils of the Russian Lycée St Georges in Meudon, just outside Paris.

The curious will want to know what we ate and it must be said at once that everything was absolutely first class. On our tables were five glasses by each plate: water, fruit juice, red and white wine and vodka. Each was topped up as we drank. On our plates were portions of nine fine Russian zakuski, among them: zander stuffed with smoked salmon, beluga, reindeer with juniper berries, syomga with cranberry sauce and pine nuts. The main dish was venison with honeyed apples and raspberry sauce. Dessert was a rich cowberry pie with cream ice and berry sauce.

I wish I could say that the talk at my table was as scintillating as the food and the entertainment, but this was not exactly the case. My neighbours and I did not get into serious conversation – perhaps we were all a bit overawed by the occasion. However, I was impressed with President Putin's lack of ceremony in sitting among us and the absence of heavy security.

When the event drew to a close I witnessed what to me was a remarkable phenomenon. As Mr Putin rose to leave at around four o'clock, first isolated individuals, then more and more surrounded Mr Putin and engaged him in talk. Prominent among them, recognisable by their dress, were two orthodox Jews and a Muslim imam. It took the President at least 15 minutes to walk from the centre of the hall to the door, surrounded by a thick crowd of people anxious to have a word. This time security men did appear and kept a watchful eye.

The following day in the VIP departure lounge I spoke with Count Sheremetev, who reported his mixed feelings at attending a function in a building to which his ancestors would have had access by right. And in another moment of deep historical irony, at Reading station on my way back to Malvern I met, and spent hours talking to, a Russian from Lithuania, now a homeless dropout abandoned by the friends who had brought him to Britain. He felt ashamed to return to face his mother, having come to seek his fortune with no knowledge of English and few technical skills. We worked out some practical ideas, but whether our system had any sympathy with his case I shall probably never find out.

Andrew Jameson is former lecturer in Russian at Lancaster University, Chair of the Russian Committee of the Association for Language Learning and a member of the Institute of Linguists. He is also a member of the SCRSS Council.

SCRSS News

SCRSS AGM

Notice is hereby given that the Society's Annual General Meeting will take place at 10.30am on Saturday 19 May 2007 at the SCRSS premises in Brixton. Nominations for members to be elected to the next Council and motions for the AGM should be sent by individual SCRSS members to Head

Office no later than Friday 20 April. All nominations and motions must be seconded by another SCRSS member.

Existing Council members due for re-nomination to the Council in 2007 are Ralph Gibson, Philip Matthews and John Riley.

Honorary officers due for re-nomination in 2007 are (President) Jack Gaster, (Vice-Presidents) Professor William Bowring, Professor R Davies, Sir Edward Downes, Stanley Forman, Dr Rachel O'Higgins and Robert Wareing, MP (co-opted in 2006).

SCRSS Russian Seminar: 11–12 April 2007

We are proud to announce the SCRSS Russian Seminar, a two-day intensive programme of lectures in Russian on contemporary society, culture and linguistics, given by lecturers from St Petersburg University.

The seminar is aimed at teachers of Russian, graduates and final-year undergraduates of Russian who have a good aural understanding of Russian and wish to keep abreast of the latest developments in Russia.

Participants will attend four lectures per day with a choice for each session. Lectures will last 45 minutes with 15 minutes for discussion. The full programme of lecture topics will be confirmed nearer the date of the seminar. Participants may attend one or both days.

Lecturers:

- Anna Maslennikova: Professor of the Department of Philology and Director of the Centre for American and British Studies, St Petersburg University.
- Natalia Rogozhina: Deputy Director of the Science Department, St Petersburg University, member of the Secretariat of MAPRYAL, Deputy Director of the Secretariat of the Russian Society of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature.

Date: 11–12 April 2007 (10am–4.15pm daily)

Venue: SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB

Fee: £35 (one day), £60 (two days)

Application deadline: 14 March 2007

Payment deadline: 28 March 2007

As places are limited, early booking is recommended.

See sheet enclosed with this mailing for further details and an application form.

St Petersburg University Exchange Programme

From 13–16 February the SCRSS organised an educational programme in London for a group of 10 students and lecturers from the St Petersburg State University Schools of International Relations and Philology. It included meetings with Simon Hughes, MP for North Southwark and Bermondsey, at his House of Commons office, former Mayor Cllr Blango and officers of Southwark Council at the Town Hall, and visits to the Russian Embassy and the English Speaking Union. The leader of the group, Professor Vladimir Smirnov, also visited the Society to view its library, which greatly impressed him. He offered to supply new Russian books on history and literature for the Society's use.

Events

Friday 16 March 7pm

Lecture: Horses for Courses: Solving Russian–English Translation Problems – A Systematic Approach

By Andrew Jameson, former lecturer in Russian at Lancaster University and member of the Institute of Linguists and the Presidium of MAPRYAL. Andrew Jameson outlines his theory of practical translation as applied to Russian–English in all genres.

Wednesday 11 – Thursday 12 April

Event: SCRSS Russian Seminar

See entry above for further information.

Saturday 19 May 10.30am

SCRSS AGM

At the SCRSS premises. Open to SCRSS members only.

All lectures and film shows take place at the SCRSS premises in Brixton. Admission: £3.00 (members), £5.00 (non-members). Tea and coffee available.

Russian Visa Application Form Changes

Following a recent change to visa procedures, handwritten visa application forms are no longer accepted by the Russian Consulate and all applicants must now complete an *online* form at www.rusembolon.org. Either complete and submit the form online or complete the form online and print off before sending it, with your passport, to the Russian Consulate by post.

Obituary

Fr Hugh Bridge (1948–2007)

The SCRSS regrets to announce the unexpected death of Father Hugh Bridge on the night of 21/22 January 2007 in Darent Valley Hospital, Dartford, Kent. Father Hugh died of complications arising from a severe chest infection.

Father Hugh was born in 1948 in Orpington and educated at Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School for Boys, where from his early teens he developed an interest in both religion and politics (he was a member of the Labour Party Young Socialists). He won an open Exhibition to Oriel College Oxford to study Natural Sciences (Chemistry). He converted to Catholicism before he left Oxford in 1970, enrolled at St John's Seminary in Wonersh three years later and was ordained to the priesthood in November 1977. At the time of his death he was parish priest at St Francis de Sales Church in

Hartley, Kent. He was active in many community organisations, including Myrrh Education and Training, and the House of Mercy, Gravesend. He was also a great bibliophile who ran the Rectory Row Press and a large private Russian library.

Father Hugh was a long-time member and generous supporter of the SCRSS.

Feature

Does Russia Want Tourists?

By Christina Gibbons, Operations Manager at Regent Holidays

1st March marks the end of an era with the closure of yet another relic of Soviet times, the Hotel Ukraina in Moscow. The Ukraina has been a symbol of Stalin's grand plans since 1956. Towering over the River Moskva in a prime position opposite the White House, it is the last of the 'Stalin Wedding Cakes' to succumb to the relentless drive to show the world that Russia has wealth and the right kind of accommodation to attract expense-account-paying business clients or wealthy tourists.

Over the last decade all the centrally located 'tourist' class hotels have been razed to the ground to be replaced by luxury properties. The Intourist, Moskva and Rossiya may have been monstrosities of Soviet planning, clumsily built over priceless architectural gems, but they proved Russia could build them cheap and stack them high. In the heady days of the '70s and '80s demand for moderately priced, central hotels was at its peak as schools, colleges and political groups all flocked to see for themselves life behind the Iron Curtain.

Of course the world has moved on and today's visitors expect to be greeted with more than a shrug of the shoulders or a firm *nyet* to the simplest of requests. Yes, it is comforting to see a smiling face at reception, but 24-hour room service, decent

restaurants and showers that do not emit murky, brown water come at a high price.

The cost and complications of the visa process are enough to deter the casual tourist, so why not embrace those visitors who are interested enough to overcome these obstacles? Of course, it is tempting to look only to the higher-spending visitors, but what country can afford to ignore less affluent travellers? Where do the bulk of the profits from the 4–5* hotel chains go? They are certainly not invested in local infrastructure. Check the names of the hotel managers. They will not sound Russian.

No one expects to see the return of the likes of the Rossiya in the centre of town, but the market is big enough to embrace smaller, cheaper hotels in more central locations. Look how the likes of Prague, Tallinn and Budapest – to name but a few – have thrived by offering a range of hotels. Russia needs to look at its markets and its competition. How strange that the largest country in the world with the longest railway line, the deepest lake and many more superlatives does not have tourist boards in all major cities. How complacent to believe that visitors will come whatever the price, terrorist threat, political upheaval or natural disaster.

For all its faults – its surly service, overpriced bars and restaurants, dingy rooms and ridiculous 4* status – it will be a sad, sad day when the Ukraina closes its doors to emerge as another gleaming, expensive but soulless tribute to riches and commerce.

For the foreseeable future, unless you have very deep pockets, you had better swot up the Cyrillic characters as you will need them to get to grips with public transport. The opportunity to find reasonably priced accommodation within walking distance of the centre of town will be a no, no or a definite *nyet, nyet*.

Christina Gibbons has worked at Regent Holidays for 21 years and specialises in tours to Russia, the Trans-Siberian Railway

Belarus, China and Mongolia. She has been a frequent visitor to Russia since the 1970s.

Book Reviews

Rossica International Review of Russian Culture, Issue 16: Tretyakov Gallery
Editor-in-Chief: Svetlana A Adjoubei (Academia Rossica, 143pp)

Rossica 16 is a special issue published to mark the 150th anniversary of the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. The gallery is notable for being the first collection of Russian art open to the general public and has become one of the world's leading museums. The centrepiece of the journal, 'Tireless Devotion: Pages from the History of Pavel Tretyakov's Collection' by Tatiana Yudenkova and based on her book about the gallery, introduces the reader to the Tretyakov and its history with many fine illustrative examples of the most significant works in the various collections. Other articles explore some of the different artistic movements represented, including iconography, the 20th-century avant-garde and the contemporary scene.

Lavishly illustrated in full colour throughout, the articles will attract not only the specialist art historian but are accessible enough to appeal to the non-specialist interested in discovering more about this jewel in the cultural crown of Russia.

By Jill Cunningham

Incidences

By Daniil Kharms (Translated by Neil Cornwell, Serpent's Tail, 2006, ISBN: 1-85242-480-X, Paperback, £8.99)

Daniil Ivanovich Iuvachov was born in St Petersburg in 1905, the son of a political, religious and literary figure. He took the name Kharms, possibly in tribute to

Sherlock Holmes (pronounced Kholms in Russian).

In 1920s Leningrad he became famous as a children's story writer and a member of the avant-garde Association of Real Art, which considered itself to be the left wing of the avant-garde, indulging in eccentric 'happenings' and highly unconventional theatrical evenings of an absurdist variety.

This book is a collection of his funny, anarchic, even violent and pornographic stories and plays. Arrested twice for brief periods for not toeing the socialist realist line (the latter in 1941 during the siege of Leningrad), he died in 1942 of starvation.

This has tempted many Western writers to see his work solely as a satire on life under Stalin. However, his stories are as random in their targets as Lewis Carroll's or Edward Lear's nonsense rhymes and tales – writers whom Kharms admired. They reflect the everyday struggle for existence in pre-WWII Leningrad, – the queues for food, the difficulties of living in a communal flat – but their crazy humour will still appeal to modern readers.

By Jean Turner

Shostakovich: His Life and Music
By Brian Morton (Haus Publishing,
October 2006, ISBN: 1-904950-50-7,
£18.00)

Even before last year's centenary there were many books on Shostakovich, from academic studies to collections of memoirs. Now Brian Morton enters the lists with a biography that is sometimes more like a series of essays chronologically tackling issues and career highlights.

But two controversial writers' shadows fall over Morton's work. Having explained why the disputed 'memoirs' *Testimony* have to be handled carefully, Morton proceeds to draw upon the book, even quoting an entire paragraph as his summing up. Meanwhile, though he avoids the hyperactive prose of Ian MacDonald's *The New Shostakovich*

(toned down in its new edition), he does take its basic 'supposition-based-on-historical-context' approach and even, undigested, some of its ideas. With these and other sources, the lack of footnotes means that too often we are left with unattributed quotations or "one writer claimed..." type sentences without any reference. Only a real expert would recognise some of these – the very reader for whom Morton's book is largely redundant. On the plus side, the writing about the music is often colourful and certainly describes it accurately.

Classic FM's praise for the book's scholarliness is baffling: it is clearly intended as a popular, brief introductory biography and so (presumably) the publisher chose not to include footnotes, a bibliography, a discography or a complete index, features which would have qualified it for the adjective and increased its value enormously. It would have been nice also to have taken one more look before signing it off: there is a distressing number of widows and orphans and for several pages "Shostakovich" becomes "Shostakovitch". As it is, the ingénue is left (probably unknowingly) with some unsupported assertions and wondering where to go next. Laurel Fay's biography is more exhaustive but we still await the biography that combines scholarly rigour with effective evocations of the music.

By John Riley

Listings

Art and Photography

Guildhall Art Gallery

Guildhall Yard, London EC2, Tel: 020 7332 3700, www.guildhall-art-gallery.org.uk

10 January – 31 March: *Soviet Times – Russian Times 1917–2007*. Photographic exhibition to mark the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Images by some of the most prominent Soviet and Russian

photographers from the RIA Novosti archive. Monday–Saturday 10am–5pm, Sunday 12–4pm. £2.50 / £1.00 (concessions). Free entry Friday and after 3.30pm.

Chambers Gallery

23 Long Lane, London EC1

Until 23 March: Exhibition of paintings by the Ukrainian artist Grygoriy Shyshko (1923–1994), a Soviet Impressionist.

Pushkin House

5A Bloomsbury Square, London WC1

From 7 March: *Motherland*. Photographic exhibition by Simon Roberts offering a bold visual statement about the nature of contemporary Russia. *Motherland* will be published by Christ Boot Ltd in 2007.

Charities

Russian Revival Fund

Established in 1998, the Russian Revival Fund aims to train Russian psychotherapists to understand and treat the mental illness and family stress that have become widespread since the collapse of the former Soviet Union.

The Fund provides, on Russian home territory, specialist clinical training in analytical psychology for psychology graduates and teachers in university departments and institutes, doctors working in hospitals and polyclinics, and other mental healthcare workers in child and family centres. Participants are also offered personal psychotherapy, helping them to acquire the self-knowledge and emotional resources essential for their work.

The Fund's ultimate aim is to train enough Russian colleagues to establish their own training in analytical psychology and take further teaching and training to different parts of Russia and neighbouring countries. To achieve this, the Fund's graduates need international accreditation from the International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP). The project makes this possible.

For more information visit the Russian Revival Fund website at www.russianrevival.co.uk. Charity No 1115533.

Events

Gala Celebration of International Women's Day

Glaziers Hall, London Bridge, London

Presented by Barry Martin of Russia House. Call 020 7403 9922 for details.

Film

9th Company (9 Rota)

Fyodor Bondarchuk, son of acclaimed director Sergei Bondarchuk, directs this big-budget modern war epic following the ill-fated fortunes of a small group of Soviet soldiers in the Afghanistan war in 1988. *9th Company* is the Russian nomination for Best Foreign Film at the forthcoming Academy Awards. It will be showing in the UK at venues in London, Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds and Bristol. For details, call 0871 220 1000 or visit www.showcasecinemas.co.uk.

Lectures and Conferences

SCRSS

320 Brixton Road, London SW9, Tel: 020 7274 2282, www.scrss.org.uk

16 March 7pm: *Horses for Courses: Solving Russian–English Translation Problems – A Systematic Approach* by Andrew Jameson [see page 3 for details]

Sutton College of Learning for Adults Russian Circle

SCOLA, Lecture Theatre, Gibson Road, Sutton, Surrey

23 March 7pm: *Glasnost*. Introduced by Natasha Dissanayake.

11 May 7pm: *My Lady with the Little Dog* (member's presentation) and *Russia in 2007: Social, Cultural and Literary Developments* by David and Liudmilla Matthews.

Translating and Mistranslating Russia: The Cultural Aspect (16th Annual Conference)

University of St Andrews, Centre for Russian, Soviet, and Central and Eastern European Studies. Venue: St Salvator's College, North Street, St Andrews, School II and Room 31. Contact: Dr Roger Keys, Tel: 01334 462952 or 01334 463656, Email: rjk1@st-and.ac.uk

Saturday 10 March: Papers include Professor Peter France (University of Edinburgh): *Translating Russian Literature: The Pioneers*; Antony Wood: *Realising Pushkin in Lyric, Narrative and Dramatic Verse*; Robert Chandler (Queen Mary, University of London): *Coats and Turncoats: Translating the Wit of The Captain's Daughter*; Professor Mona Baker (University of Manchester): *The Interplay of Dominance and Resistance in Translation: A Narrative Perspective*; Anna Rush (University of St Andrews): *The Ironic World of Yury Tynyanov: Paradox, Epiphany and the Grotesque in Young Pushkin*. Fee: £20 (students and senior citizens £15).

Music

Goldsmiths Chamber Choir: Annual Russian Choral Music Concert

Council Chamber, Deptford Town Hall Building, New Cross Road, London SE14
8 March 7.30pm: Noëlle Mann and the Goldsmiths Chamber Choir perform a 45-minute programme comprising sacred works by Maxim Berezovsky, Pavel Chesnokov, Alexander Kastalsky and Igor Stravinsky, and arrangements of folk songs by Anatoly Liadov, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Anatoly Novikov. The concert is preceded at 6pm by a talk by Tatiana Soloviova (Goldsmiths, University of London) on *Stepan Smolensky and the Renaissance of Russian Sacred Music*. Admission free.

Publications

Clarion, No 9

Newsletter of the Alan Bush Music Trust. Includes Information about his works

recently published scores, compact discs and new recordings.

Stalin's Spy, Richard Sorge and the Tokyo Espionage Ring

By Robert Whymant (IB Tauris, Paperback, £12.99). A compelling biography of a spy as skilled as James Bond who changed the course of history.

Travel

Regent Holidays

15 John Street, Bristol BS1 2HR, Tel: 0870 499 0911, Fax: 01179 254 866, Email: regent@regent-holidays.co.uk, www.regent-holidays.co.uk

Regent Holidays offers tours to the Baltic states and Poland, Russia and the Trans-Siberian Railway, China and North Korea, as well as city breaks in Eastern Europe.

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