

Bagpipe melodies

Stary Olsa band leader Zmicier Sasnouski compiles encyclopaedia of Belarusian musical instruments: from Stone Age to present day

By Viktor Korbut

In days gone by, world class performers headed for Belarus' local stages to demonstrate their mastery: professional Byzantine, Italian and German orchestras toured Polotsk, Minsk and Nesvizh. Of course, they did not visit villages; they gave concerts in the homes of rich patrons. However, their music had no borders; there was no division between 'folk', 'classical' and 'pop' songs. Little is known about this but Zmicier Sasnouski (who heads *Stary Olsa*) has just released his research on the history of Belarusian musical culture. Each page is a revelation.

Zmicier is a man of few words but loves to perform: he's a true musician. Few know that he's also an academic, gathering and classifying material. His research into musical instruments in Belarus since the Stone Age seems incredible, since so little is known from the earlier part of the last millennium. In fact, a famous Austrian

conductor and professor at the Salzburg Mozerteum once noted that we know 'almost nothing about music prior to 1500'. Zmicier agrees but believes no task is impossible. Even if old sounds cannot be resurrected, we can still discover a great deal about them. Mr. Sasnouski has re-read ancient manuscripts and studied old frescoes. "I've compiled an encyclopaedia of instruments which were played in our country in days gone by and in modern times but have only published information up until the 18th century: 400 pages. Further volumes will be devoted to the following two centuries," he notes.

How have you dared to write a book? You are a musician.

As I perform ancient music, I often search for sheet music and study old instruments' appearance.

What is your most wonderful discovery?

There are so many. For example, I've found out that different kinds of bagpipes were played in Belarus — including local du-



Stary Olsa popular band and its leader Zmicier Sasnouski (right)

das, German and Scottish bagpipes. Additionally, I've learnt that musicians were as valuable as officers during an exchange of prisoners of war. Every knight was expected to have an ear for musical sounds; our countryman Frantsisk Skorina wrote that they should 'understand the voice of pipes'.

ing significant facts, which create an overview of our country's musical culture. At the Academy of Music and Academy of Arts and at our Culture University, the history of Belarusian music is taught separately, covering the organ, theatrical, pipe and folk music. I've united these, in addition to

known but few Belarusian researchers are interested in reading the works of foreign colleagues. We haven't seen that irreversible events are occurring.

The Ukrainians already call our 'Polotsk Manuscript' theirs and we aren't even aware that they've made a sensational discovery. They

the culture of those times was similar in Kiev, Polotsk and Novgorod. We shared a common language, religion, daily routine and arts. Belarus belonged to Eastern European civilisation. To understand our country's development, we must analyse that of our neighbours. We share a common legacy.

Belarusian poets named their collections of poems after musicians: *Gusliar* (a *gusli* player), *Dudar* (a *duda* player), *Dudka* (a pipe), *Smyk* (a bow), and *Skripochka* (a violin). Belarusians also call their literary greats 'pesnyars', or singers — rather than prose writers. This is because Belarusian culture long relied on songs and melodies. To understand our present, we must thoroughly study the work of our forefathers — as Mr. Sasnouski has done. As the saying goes: 'the future is founded in the past'.

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This was to allow them to distinguish their signals and to know how to move their regiments.

You're providing a panorama of Belarusian musical culture in its entirety but isn't the Academy of Sciences covering the same ground?

I'm not 'discovering America' but I am provid-

redefining various facts.

Belarusian music used to exist within a wider European context. Our culture was not a separate island; it was part of the civilised European continent. Accordingly, many episodes from history have been long ago studied by Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian researchers. Everything is already

have a new explanation for the depiction of the musicians on Sophia Cathedral's fresco. It was previously thought that they were saltimbancos; now, it's evident that the fresco depicts a Byzantine court orchestra. If this existed in Kiev, then a similar orchestra should have existed at the home of the Polotsk Duke, since

Creative return to stage

Yakub Kolas National Academic Drama Theatre revives *Boat of Despair*, based on Vladimir Korotkevich's work

By Anna Bogacheva

For a long time, audiences were unable to see the performance, due to the lack of a suitable actor for the leading role. Now, experienced Alexander Bazuk has taken on the part. He is known to Vitebsk theatre-goers for playing Gorodulin in Ostrovsky's *Wise Men*, for which he was awarded a prize for best supporting role during the 84th theatrical season. The new performance, staged by Mikhail Krasnobaev, involves 20 actors.

Boat of Despair isn't the only work by this famous Belarusian writer to be staged in Vitebsk. In 1974, the theatre premiered a performance based on Korotkevich's *Bells of Vitebsk*, attended by the author himself. In 1978, spectators were offered the tragedy *Kastus Kalinovsky* and *Sparrow Night* in the



Boat of Despair performance is again staged in Vitebsk

1990s. The theatre is now working on *Leonids Won't Return up to the Earth* (or *Impossible to Forget*), scheduled for 2011.

Vladimir Korotkevich was the first Belarusian writer to develop historical detective stories, being given the Yakub Kolas State Award for his *Black Castle of Olshany*. He also won the Literary Award for his *Impossible to For-*

get novel, alongside the Order of the Friendship of Nations. His works are vivid and boast fascinating, dynamic plots. His *Ears under Your Sickle*, *The Wild Hunt of King Stakh*, *Christ Landed in Grodno* and *Grey Legend* are mandatorily studied at school, being true masterpieces. Moreover, many works by Korotkevich have been made into films.

Exotic shots of beauty hunters

By Alla Kazakova

Museum of Minsk History shows creativity of Lithuanian photographers Jurga and Ričardas Anusauskai

Alongside exotic shots, the guests brought unusual souvenirs: musical instruments from Africa, Mexican arrows and various amulets. The two masters have organised over 20 exhibitions in Lithuania, Latvia, France and elsewhere, with their works showcased many times in Vitebsk, at the International Slavonic Bazaar Arts Festival.

"We are beauty hunters," notes Jurga. "My husband and I have managed to visit various continents. Each is unique in its own way but they are united by a single problem: ecology. People have even begun to privatise jungles, constructing luxurious hotels and golf courses there, regardless of animals



Anusauskai artists

being turned from their natural habitats. We're concerned about them, as we don't want tigers, elephants and hyenas to disappear from the planet, only known to our descendants by their photos. My husband failed to shoot wolves in Lithuania but managed to capture them in Belarus."

The Lithuanian couple also enjoyed a memorable trip to the Belarusian marshes; this unique corner of nature impressed them so greatly that they plan to return with a new project.