

Business of musical sales

Sellers of musical instruments cope with consequences of economic crisis

By Marina Dremova

"Musical instruments have always been in demand," explain the staff from Muzyka — a music shop which has been in business for 35 years. "However, their range has expanded; we now offer ten different violins, instead of three, with each differing in tone and price."

A shop assistant from another shop notes, "Belarusians are a musical nation, with parents often keen to see their children learn an instrument. Accordingly, they buy what's needed. Violins and cellos must be of good quality to ensure they play well. This is necessary to at least become a competent amateur, if not a highly skilled professional musician. With this in mind, people tend to buy the best they can afford. Some people have an ear for music but, with-

out a good instrument, this ability can be quickly lost."

Shops don't just display stringed instruments these days; they boast a wide range of instruments, from drums to pianos and sound equipment. The acoustic guitar remains the most popular though. "Our shop alone offers 140 models, suitable for professionals and amateur players," smiles

Marina Sankovich, Muzyka's Director. "We can also organ-

ise lessons for our buyers, delivered by specialists from houses of culture, clubs and schools. We host press conferences featuring famous musicians and beginners."

To learn about new deliveries and prices, you can simply visit the website of a particular shop. At first sight, it seems that shops have no problem achieving sales, but advertising is still necessary, with posters displayed on the

metro. There's no doubt that the impact of the economic crisis has been felt in the musical segment, as it has been elsewhere. "Shops are closing or cutting their number of branches in the city," sighs Vitaly, a manager at MuzIN musical salon. "We've had to close two of our four shops to remain afloat."

Shops which have been operating on the market for several years are the major importers of instruments from abroad. Guitars primarily arrive from Germany, Spain and China, while violins are bought from China and Germany. It's also possible to order an Italian violin but it can take six months to make an individual instrument, with a hefty price tag as a result. "A hundred grand pianos take some time to sell," says Ms.



Each violin differs in price and tone



Guitars enjoy demand

Sankovich, adding, "It's impossible to foresee when a buyer of a certain instrument will come, so some sit in our shop for quite a long time." Vitaly relies on offering a diverse range of recognisable brands, with 135 guitars in the shop and another 300 in the warehouse — enough for six months. Pre-sale tuning of an instrument is offered as a bonus. "It's good if I sell one guitar a day but I may sell up to ten! Some people are just browsing of course. Sales fluctuate so we need to keep our fingers on the pulse."

Contemporary transformation of unique hand-written monument

Belarusian Exarchate Publishing House donates facsimile copies of Slutsk Gospel to more than ten major libraries countrywide

The National Library hosted the presentation as part of its *Family — Unity — Fatherland* spiritual and enlightening programme and the *Return of Relics* project. Copies of the unique edition have been given to the country's largest libraries, with future donations planned to district libraries. The Slutsk Gospel is a unique manuscript from the late 16th century, considered to be one of the greatest Orthodox relics in Belarus. It was finished in 1581, in Slutsk, and is believed to have been written by Duke Yuri Olelkovich — the father of St. Sophia Slutskaya.

In 1889, the relic was exhibited at the Moscow Archaeological Exhibition and was owned by the St. Trinity Monastery until 1917. Later it was given to Minsk's State Museum and then, in the late 1920s, was transferred to the Belarusian State Museum in Mogilev. The Slutsk Gospel disappeared at the start of the Great Patriotic War, in 1941, alongside other exhibits, but was suddenly found in the early 1990s. It had been in the hands of a private collector who gave it to the priest of one of Minsk's churches.

Learning through our screens

To become better acquainted with Belarus, it takes more than a single drive through by car. Of course, it's easier to watch television than to go exploring. If you want to learn more about our country, it's hard to know which is the best channel to choose... there are so many. To discover the traditions of Belarus, be they sporting or cultural, *Lad Channel* may be solution. Rather than discussing politics or passing news stories, it concentrates on the true spirit of the country. Its Chief Director, Sergey Kukhto, tells us more

By Victor Andreev

What's the difference between Belarusian and foreign TV channels?

In my view, our great advantage is that we have not chased all the latest modern trends and have avoided copying foreign formats.

What's better: to purchase a well-promoted show from abroad or to make your own?

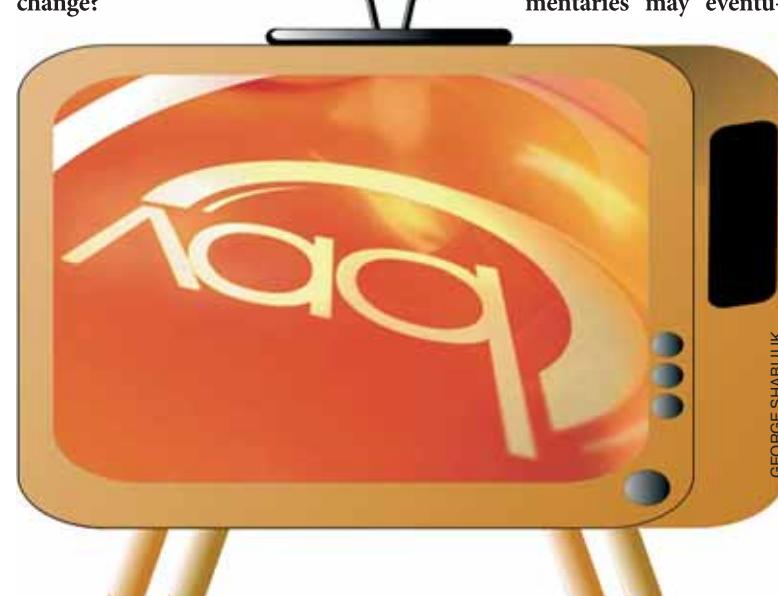
Sadly, our media market has very few programmes which completely pay for themselves. From an economic point of view, it's more profitable to buy a licensed product, broadcast it and earn even more. However, there's no doubt that the TV industry must develop and there's no hope of this unless we shoot our own programmes. Domestically-made programmes occupy the lion's share of broadcasting, as we've unanimously decided to invest huge sums only in our own serious programmes.

These will be classics which can be broadcast every six to twelve months: they'll be landmarks. We're injecting money into documentaries, as well as educational programmes and those for children. Our TV channel broadcasts news from the country's regions, so our viewers can see events taking place in Belarus' more remote areas.

You say documentaries are being developed. Not long ago, these were rarely aired. What has inspired this change?

better we study historical events, and in more detail, the fewer mistakes we'll make in life.

Do you believe that documentaries may eventually



GEORGE SHABLIUK

ally prove more popular than soap operas?

I'd love this to happen but I don't want to offend soap opera lovers. I advocate a more diverse range of programming, so people have more choice.

Do you think Belarus needs its own sports channel, as discussed in recent years?

Forest in its full beauty

By Nikolay Lutsevich

Painting, photos and graphic pieces on show at landscape festival dedicated to International Year of Forests, held at National Library of Belarus

Painter Fiodor Yastreb, curator of the exhibition and Chairman of the International Guild of Painters Public Association, noted at the opening ceremony that the exhibited works show not simply images of forests, but their authors' perception of forests. "Undoubtedly, the photographers don't just admire forests, but feel part of nature. Forests create a philosophy for life; they are a self-contained world — a separate kingdom. There's no better teacher than nature for any creative person. Only nature can push us to really love our land," Mr. Yastreb asserted.

Forests are the planet's 'lungs' — vital to our biological, economic and social life. However, they are reducing in size daily, negatively affecting our climate and ecology. The UN General Assembly has proclaimed 2011 to be the International Year of Forests, campaigning to promote public awareness of the importance of forest ecosystems and the need to protect and expand them.

Visitors to the exhibition at the National Library of Belarus are able to view works by Alexander Grishkevich, Ales Susha, Yegor Batalyonok, Georgy Poplavsky, Victor Suglob, Valery Vedrenko, Vadim Kachan and others.

Of course, just as it needs its own educational channel and children's channel. However, we must assess this objectively, since it's expensive. If we had as much oil and as much money as Saudi Arabia, our only problem would be how to spend it! Nevertheless, I'm sure that we'll have our own sports channel sooner or later. We have many fans and a grand event is coming up for Minsk: the World Ice Hockey Championship, scheduled for 2014.

What lies ahead for our TV programming?

The quality of each TV programme depends on the financial resources available. If Russian channels earn more, they can spend more; it's a simple law of economics. At the moment, our advertising market is growing, but not as quickly as we might wish. However, progression is evident, compared with three to five years ago, with the quality of programming improving. Actually, people are spending more time than ever at home with their families, watching TV, rather than going out to restaurants and so on, so the time is ripe for broadcasting to provide a better service. We are ready to offer new, original and interesting programmes.

What is needed to become a Belarusian television host?

Having your own original idea is the best way; our programmes tend to be hosted, headed or serviced by those who created them. We're always searching for fresh ideas, from anyone who offers them, regardless of profession. We must attract clever and talented people into television.