

Easy to drown in beauty's blue eyes

Irina Khanunik-Rombalskaya wins 'Mrs. Supermodel' title at *Mrs. Universe 2011* pageant

By Viktor Korbut

Stolichnoye Television channel host Irina Khanunik-Rombalskaya admitted on returning from Bulgaria, "I've revealed the secret of Belarusians' beauty. We conquer the world with our blue eyes. Ladies with such eyes always win prizes at beauty pageants." Interestingly, Irina was taking part for the first time. Having worked as a model, it didn't enter her head to try for a beauty title but fate had other plans.

"I was invited to take part by the World League of Beauty and Fashion's National Director, Vitaly Zhilinsky. I thought he was joking but, later, agreed," she smiles. "Until the last moment, I didn't believe that I'd be going to the contest. It was only on receiving an invitation from the organisers that I realised it was true. I even had to cancel a scheduled shooting for Belarusfilm and for television and had to take a crash course to improve my English. Contestants had to prepare an English language report on how their country is battling domestic violence, defending

it during contest week. I studied for two hours daily with a tutor to improve my language knowledge and worthily represent our country."

Tell us more about the report; it caused a stir abroad, didn't it?

I independently wrote the report on how Belarus is tackling domestic violence, with some assistance from the Interior Ministry (which gave me official data). Previously, I'd shot films on this topic, so I had some idea of the facts. I tried to mention not only official figures but to speak of the creative measures taken by our country. Belarus was the first former Soviet republic to recognise domestic violence by law. Some women are embarrassed to admit it takes place, which was the major problem I highlighted. In recent years, Belarusian women have become more decisive in defending their rights I think.

Audiences know of you as a witty host. Meanwhile, a beauty pageant focuses primarily on appearance. What was your attraction?

In line with the contest rules, I had to take a national

costume, evening and cocktail dresses, high heeled shoes and a swimsuit. Nothing was bought especially for the pageant though; some were provided by Stolichnoye Television and some were given to me by the National Beauty School. I only had to buy souvenirs. Belarusian designer Ivan Aiplatov gave me violet silk gloves, which helped me during my report. In English, 'violet' is similar in pronunciation to 'violence', so I used the pun to create a joke... urging that only light-hearted battles be fought in the home.

Belarusians are appreciated all over the world for their grace. Is this a myth do you think? You must have compared yourself with other contestants...

The competition brought together women of different nationalities — from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and our neighbouring states of Latvia, Ukraine and Russia. All are absolutely different but very interesting. Among thirty girls, there were only five blondes — including me. I shared a room with a Ukrainian and we looked like sisters. I do think that Slavs are the

most beautiful.

What characterises Belarusian beauty?

Light hair and blue eyes; many have tried to look deep into my eyes, searching for hidden mysteries. It seems to me that the trend for dark-complexioned girls is passing. We, Belarusians, shall soon win the title of the most beautiful! Of course, beauty must not be only skin deep. To become the top Mrs., a woman should be married, follow strict principles of behaviour, take part in charity projects and protect human rights. Beauty alone is not enough. She should be a true domestic goddess and a worthy human being.

Did you have to explain where Belarus is situated?

In Bulgaria, people often cried out 'Belarus!' on seeing me, saying that Belarusians are the kindest and most sincere. I felt pride for my country. People know of us! Many contestants told me that, in



Irina Khanunik-Rombalskaya

our Belarus, sports sites are being constructed and popular musical festivals are being organised and, most importantly, the most beautiful ladies live here!



Festival guests experience medieval life, taking part in intriguing events

Laughter of past age resurrected with love

By Yelena Krypunova

International Festival of Medieval Culture and Music revives entertainments of five centuries ago

Ostroshtitsky Gorodok suburb, near Minsk, became a medieval city for three days, boasting a White Castle (giving it title to the festival), equestrian competitions and archery, axe and knife throwing, camping places and a hall for dancing. In all, 450 knights from Belarus, Russia, Lithuania and Ukraine attended, joined by their beautiful ladies, musi-

cians and dancers, fire dancers and numerous guests. Various epochs neighboured each other during the holiday: from the time of Richard the Lionheart to Louis XIV. Around six centuries separate these historical ages but knights from various medieval periods managed to exist simultaneously, holding jousts and battling on foot, despite heavy rain on the final day.

Various trophies were awarded, sometimes unexpectedly. Alongside traditional awards to winners — swords, helmets and shields — a knight's 'Oscar' was given (a

small statuette of a wandering knight on a horse).

Guests were able to view how the medieval city would have functioned, while becoming part of its rich tapestry. Not everyone came in costumes replicating those of five hundred years ago, but the campsite was busy with visitors who were keen to try their hand at archery or axe or knife throwing. Local troubadours provided musical entertainment while hen catching proved one of the more humorous entertainments. A tournament for knights on horses concluded the wonderful festival.

Artist inspires sculpture

By Yelena Melnikova

National Art Museum of Belarus presented with Svetlana Gorbunova's Artist and the City: M. Chagall sculpture — part of her private collection for 17 years

The sculpture has been presented to the museum by its general partner — the British-American Tobacco Trading Company, which has been sponsoring the museum for over a decade. "This is an important event both for our museum and our Republic — domestically and abroad," notes the National Art Mu-

seum's General Director, Vladimir Prokoptsov.

The sculpture is devoted to 20th century prominent artist Marc Chagall, who was among the founders of the Parisian pictorial school. Israel, France, Russia and, naturally, Belarus, view him as their 'own' but the image of his native Vitebsk was ever depicted on his great canvases.

Belarusian master Svetlana Gorbunova (awarded with the Frantsisk Skorina Medal) has also created a monument to Symon Budny in Nesvizh, a memorial complex on the site of the burnt village of Litovets in the Minsk Re-

gion's Dzerzhinsk District, and a tombstone to Kondrat Krapiva. She was inspired to create a sculpture of Chagall after visiting the USA. "The UN General Assembly's hall has a glass window by Chagall, which made me feel the artist's nostalgia. I then had the idea of creating Marc Chagall's image," explains Ms. Gorbunova. "Chagall left his country at a young age but carried his motherland in his heart his entire life; it inspired his artistry, which contains motifs devoted to Vitebsk. My sculpture shows how we must love our homeland and what it can give us in return."

Face to Face with Climate

By Valery Sidorenko

Belarusian-Swedish exhibition of caricatures on show at Gavriil Vashchenko Picture Gallery in Gomel

The exhibition is devoted to sustainable development, featuring installations, photos and collages, combining classical caricatures and modern art trends. Of course, the ecological theme is topical for the Gomel

Region, which was most affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

The project explores our society's sustainable development, while spreading information on ecological problems. It was launched in 2010 in Iceland, later moving to the Balkans, Malaysia, Latvia and Russia. Each host country had two sections at its exhibition: one comprising local artists' works and the other showing pieces by Swedish artists.

Visitors to the gallery can view works drawn for the Belarusian-Swedish *Comic Strips for Sustainable Development* programme, painted by amateur artists during master classes. Several such master classes are to be organised for Gomel Arts College students, allowing them to learn more about climate change, and about the genre of comic strip creation — on the topic of sustainable development.