



A trumpeter at Grodno's fire-observation tower



Urbanities in Sovetskaya pedestrian street

Landing retro-train to read first newspaper

Grodno guests surprised at unusual excursions

By Viktor Andreev

Grodno, despite being younger than Polotsk (celebrating its 1150th anniversary this year), boasts some of the oldest buildings in the country: a 12th century church and 14th-18th century castles. Moreover, many buildings in the historical centre have witnessed events from European history. The inventor of Esperanto, Dr. Zamenhof, used to live in Grodno, as did Polish writer Eliza Orzeszkowa. Buildings near Orzeszkowa's house are now being renovated, as so much of Belarus' history is connected with this part of the city. Excursions are already proving popular.

Who is Orzeszkowa's neighbour?

An early 20th century house, initially built as a pharmacy by the Grodno Charity Society, is being reconstructed. Interestingly, in the 1920s, it housed the editorial office of the *Echo Grodzieńskie* newspaper. Historian Andrey Vashkevich explains, "This house is vital to Orzeszkowa Street, which can't be imagined without this building in modern style."

Excursion guide Victor Kireyev tells me that Belarus' first newspaper was set up in Grodno. "I'll show you where the underground editorial office and printing house were located during the war and what Vasil Bykov wrote in the regional *Grodnenskaya Pravda* (Grodno Truth) newspaper," he smiles.

It's no secret that Belarus' first newspaper was called *Awizy Grodzieńskie*. However, not everyone is aware of the details of its publication. Mr. Kireyev reveals, "The word 'awiza' is used even now — in the banking sphere; it means 'message'. Sejms of the Rzech Pospolita were organised here from 1673, so ambassadors needed to be aware of the latest events in the country and abroad. Only one copy of the Grodno newspaper remains, held by the Jagiellonian University, in Krakow. *Awizy* appeared on an A4 sheet, printed on both sides, without illustrations. In 1776, *Gazety Grodzieńskiej* newspaper was launched and, after joining Russia, the text shifted to Russian language. During WWI, German *Grodno Zeitung* appeared and, in 1919, the first Grodno newspapers in Belarusian were released: Belarus (Belarusian), Batskaushchyna (Fatherland), *Belaruski Narod* (Be-

larusian Nation), as well as the Yiddish press.

Express to the past

From 1851-1862, the first railway section was constructed in Belarus, along the Grodno-Porechie route. Now, the section is to become an historical site, open to tourists.

"We're planning an open air railway museum whose major pride will be an old train, travelling between Grodno and Porechie," notes Cheslav Shulga, Belarus' Deputy Minister for Sports and Tourism. In June and July, the train will be officially launched, having 1st, 2nd and 3rd class carriages, as well as a restaurant-car in

which waiters in 19th century costumes will serve.

The museum is to be located in the old locomotive depot in Porechie, even allowing visitors to 'construct' a virtual railway line. The second storey of the railway station will have hotel rooms while the basement will house exhibitions dedicated to the history of Porechie station and the events of the 1863 rebellion. Moreover, the old warehouse will be used as a tavern.

The express train takes four hours to travel from Minsk to Grodno for those wishing to visit from the Belarusian capital.



At Festival of National Cultures

All nations coming

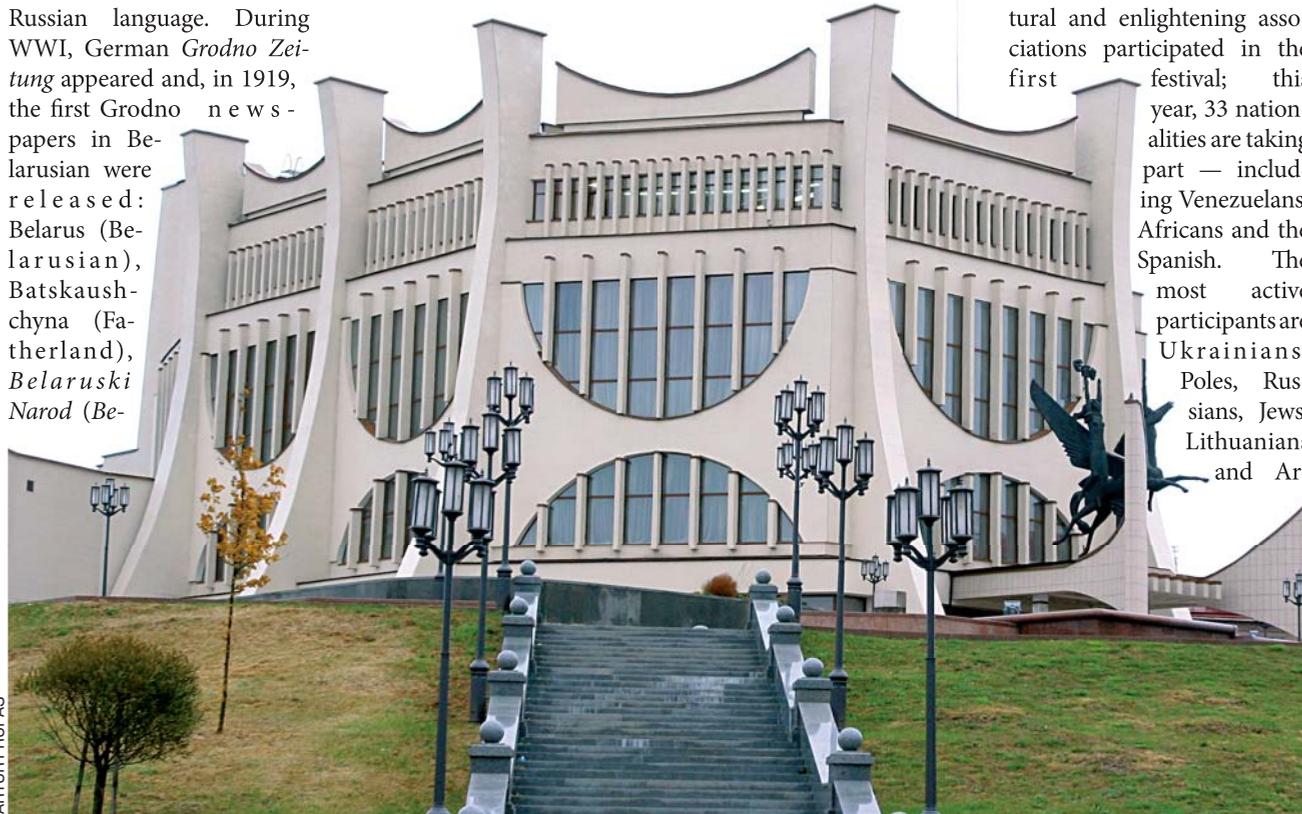
This year, there's more than one reason to visit Grodno. Over 60 bands are to take part in the final of the Festival of National Cultures — scheduled for early June.

In 1996, 11 national cultural and enlightening associations participated in the first festival; this year, 33 nationalities are taking part — including Venezuelans, Africans and the Spanish. The most active participants are Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, Jews, Lithuanians and Ar-

menians.

Meanwhile, exhibitions of decorative-and-applied arts are to be organised on a wide scale, in addition to displays of costumes and a food fair of national dishes. National handicraft 'courtyards' will be dedicated to spring holidays and customs, and guests will be able to see reproductions of Queen Bona Sforza's clothes. Work on the collection began last autumn, with dresses sewn by Grodno pupils and college students (from the Grodno Methodical Centre of Folk Crafts). Contemporary fabrics have been chosen carefully, to ensure they reflect the fashions of the time. In shades of blue and yellow, these colours reflect those of the Grodno coat of arms, depicting St. Hubert's deer: donated to the city by Queen Bona.

The 'Cover of the World' patchwork quilt (made from 50x50cm squares donated from around the globe) is also to go on show. Work began two years ago, with each square needing to be sewn together to create the magnificent quilt of international origins.



Grodno Regional Drama Theatre