

Impressions generously repay high price of restoration



The palace and park ensemble of 16-19th century Nesvizh

History really can revive right before our eyes. Recently, the gate keepers and guards of Nesvizh Castle dressed in costumes from the time of prominent Radziwill Sierotka. He welcomed guests himself at the door, noting that he had built the castle himself and that it now enabled ‘our descendants to be proud of their history’.

By Veniamin Khmelevsky

In the central hall, men and women performed a graceful dance, with a string quartet playing in the ballroom and an ancient ballad sung in the concert hall, its words piercing the soul.

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko wrote in the visitor book: ‘The rich cultural and historical heritage of Belarus arouses a feeling of pride in each resident. The palace and park estate in Nesvizh, registered on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, is one of our unique architectural monuments. It has undergone reconstruction many times — after war, fire and periods of decline. Due to the work of restorers, builders and museum specialists, we see Nesvizh Castle today in its full beauty. May this wonderful site of domestic architecture remain an embodiment of Belarus’ cultural legacy: a symbol of the inexhaustible creative powers and capabilities of our nation.’

Of course, Belarus is rich in such symbols; we just need to ‘involve’ our hands and souls.

Mr. Lukashenko was the first to tour the renovated castle, followed by many others that day, with no charge made for entry. However, there’s no need for sadness if you missed the opening day, as the ticket price is affordable — especially when so many amazing impressions are to be enjoyed.

I think I can truthfully say that Nesvizh Castle is unique country-wide. The multi-cultural centre (as it is called by its director, Sergey Klimov) is the first of its kind. Mir Castle, which opened a couple of years ago, is more modest and boasts less authenticity.

At Nesvizh, at eve-



At Nesvizh Castle



Radzivils’ costume exhibition

ry turn, we are reminded of the former owners and the time in which they lived. Walking from one hall to another, you can easily imagine strolling through the Winter Palace, Peterhof or the Kremlin’s museum. Of course, the scale is smaller but the decoration of the rooms is quite comparable. Meanwhile, there is the harmonious combination of historical interiors and museum displays.

On touring the grand building, the President listened attentively to the

excursion guide, asking specific questions and commenting on historical moments. He even asked the singer in the concert hall to sing a piece outside of the set programme. He was clearly impressed, although he noted that costs may have been reduced, and the project achieved more quickly. Nevertheless, the reconstruction is worthy of pride, having involved our top specialists; we were able to conduct much of the specialised work ourselves, while learning from our foreign colleagues. The organisation could have been improved upon though; from 1997 to 2012, Mr. Lukashenko gave 19 instructions regarding the reconstruction of the castle

and estate at Nesvizh, which is surely excessive. He warned, ‘This is the last castle restoration project I will supervise. The restoration industry should be overseen by a single organisation. We spent a fortune on restoration — far more than is seen abroad.’

According to the Belarusian leader, it is vital not to lose the skills of our high class specialist-restorers. He asserted, ‘They are rare people and they should receive a good salary for their labour.’ It seems likely that they’ll be busy, as Pavel Latushko, Belarus’ Culture Minister,

notes that 38 sites are earmarked under the Castles of Belarus programme (until 2018). Those in Lida, Ruzhany, Novogrudok and Krevo are next in line, with restorers and builders having much work to do. Naturally, there is great cost and labour involved.

The President of Belarus presented an 18th century Slutsk-type sash to the museum and then chatted to Maciej Radziwill — a 14th generation descendant of the Sierotkas. He noted, touchingly, ‘I’m glad that the castle has been restored, as it is the most vital castle for our family. Our ancestors didn’t want to leave it in 1939 but were obliged to. However, our hearts will always remain here.’

The President then offered a sincere invitation, asking that the family visit whenever they wish to.

The opening day saw all of Nesvizh (and the rest of the country) celebrating, with concerts taking place everywhere. Strolling from one to another, foreign languages were often heard, showing international interest in the event. Judging by the restored estate, we are capable of impressing and surprising old and new friends alike. Everyone is welcome!

