

Atmosphere of past revived by ancient instruments

Stary Olsa band improvises and restores

By Alexey Voskovsky

Musicians stand in a row on stage, beginning by playing the lute, bagpipe or heavy drum on two shoulder straps. Listeners might imagine themselves in some medieval ballroom or roadside tavern. Minsk's *Stary Olsa* band has been playing medieval Belarusian music for many years, reviving ancient folk ballads and court dances.

Dmitry Sosnovsky, the founder and leader of the band, tells us his ideas:

Dmitry, several times a year, your band organises 'medieval discos' — please explain!

We play ancient dance music in a club, so people can feel the atmosphere. Only wine and beer are offered — as there were no strong drinks in those days; invited artistes from various theatres perform medieval dances, encouraging people to learn. We try to recreate the atmosphere of a medieval tavern, since a contemporary club is a tavern in essence. Many come in ancient costume, filling the whole dance floor, while we give ancient toasts from on stage.

Who comes?

Our recent concert in Polotsk saw pensioners, students and representatives of hippie and punk cultures, as well as heavy rock. Contemporary instruments — electronic and

keyed — are too precise and artificial; many are already fed up with them. We offer live sound; ancient instruments don't harmonise completely, creating more atmosphere.

Did you start playing this music to revive that age?

There are various forms of historical memory. Some play folk music while others practice palaeography or reenact knightly battles. I've tried everything and understand that music inspires the greatest emotions and most closely creates the atmosphere of the past.

Being an historian by education, you play the bagpipes in the band...

The topic of my diploma paper was 'Reasons for the Appearance of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania'. We also have a cook in the band, as well as an automobile mechanic and a programmer. On first hearing the bagpipe — the *duda* — it became my favourite instrument. I studied from Latvian masters how to make *dudas*; when you learn the arrangement of the instrument, it becomes easier to play it.

The band plays many unfamiliar instruments — such as the *tromba marina* and *chalmereau*...

A *tromba marina* is a prototype of a double-bass, being a low toned bowed instrument with thick spun

strings. A *chalmereau* is a prototype of a *zhaleika*. Some of the instruments which we use or would like to use are seen only in frescoes, engravings and miniatures. We either create them

Dmitry Sosnovsky: Some of the instruments which we use or would like to use exist only in frescoes, engravings and miniatures, with no physical examples remaining.



themselves or give drawings to masters.

This is research rather than simply music...

I've already released three books; the latest is 'The History of Belarusian Musical Culture in the 19th-20th

Century' — presented in Minsk in spring. 'Stary Olsa' is a research laboratory. We've used material from the 'Polotskaya Tetrad' [The Polotsk Notebook contains canzonas and dance performances of western and eastern European origin and is a unique monument of 17th century Polish-Belarusian culture] and never use modern instruments; we only arrange what has been a l-

ready written by medieval authors.

That must be challenging...

Before the baroque age, music was a form of public improvisation. Musicians didn't know what they would play on arriving at a feast — be it in a tavern or noble manor. They had to change the melody while performing. Many compositions in the 'Polotskaya Tetrad' have only an initial phrase. Others have no fixed key or tempo. All medieval composition envisages personal creative contribution so, in developing ancient melodies, we can lay claim to authenticity. I always underline that we are still studying. Our 13 years of existence are only a first stage of mastering instruments; true medieval improvisation lies far away...

Your concerts are also experimental, aren't they?

We can't move forward without performances. To play concerts is necessary for the restoration of medieval music, as is the decoding of its musical notations.

Is your task at concerts to entertain or to enlighten?

I think it's impossible to separate the two, although entertainment is the first function of medieval music. In our situation, we also offer enlightenment. We entertain people while also giving them an opportunity to ponder.

Chronicle of native city

By Yulia Kharevich

Unique book details Pinsk history

A unique book on Pinsk's history has appeared in Belarus, entitled *The History of Pinsk from Antiquity to Modernity*. Dedicated to the 915th anniversary of the city's first mention in chronicles, the idea for the edition came from the Pre-Industrial Society History Centre at the National Academy of Sciences' History Institute, during celebrations for Pinsk's 910th birthday. The initiative was supported by

Pinsk City Executive Committee, which also helped with financing.

The book describes the history of the city from ancient times to today, containing many new facts connected with the city's archaeology: famous archaeologist Piotr Lysenko — a laureate of the State Award of Belarus — has conducted many digs there.

Only Minsk has a similar edition but it is hoped that other cities may soon receive the same attention. The Institute's Director, Vyacheslav Danilovich,

tells us, "This is a task for the future. I hope there will be understanding from local authorities, since we can create an archive which will remain for centuries. People can see the history of their native town, presented and drawn in a beautiful manner. It cannot but arouse public pride."

Speaking at an international scientific conference, Mr. Danilovich emphasised that his staff aim to promote the findings of historians more widely to the public, including via educational means.

Presentation has become quite a pleasant tradition

By Alina Grishkovets

National Library of Belarus collection expanded by Azerbaijani scientist Aida Imangulieva's edition of articles

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Azerbaijan to Belarus, H.E. Mr. Isfandiyyar Bakhtiyar Oglu Vagabzade, a doctor of philological sciences, asserts that Prof. Aida Imangulieva is the foremost Azerbaijani Oriental

scholar, known worldwide. Her book, entitled *Articles and Translations*, is collated from her writings from the 1960s-1980s and was released by the Institute of Oriental Studies at the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Imangulieva is the foremost Azerbaijani oriental studies researcher of Arab literature in our modern times and the foremost Azerbaijani doctor of sciences in Arab studies. She has opened a new page in

studying contemporary Arab literature while laying the foundations for a new school, focusing on training tomorrow's scholars. Her fundamental research enriches Azerbaijani and world oriental studies.

The Director of the National Library of Belarus, Roman Motulsky, underlines the importance of the development of Belarusian-Azerbaijani cultural ties, noting that the presentation of the best Azerbaijani editions is already a firm tradition.