

Capricious musical king

Instrument with own caretaker and four-storey building easily hidden behind its façade

By Lyudmila Minakova

The organ is often called 'the king of musical instruments', being the largest and one of the oldest in the world. The first organs were made in the 2nd century BC, but were water-powered at that time. It's said that an organ can easily replace a whole orchestra, so where is the oldest organ in Belarus?

Instrument's history

"Organs are usually thought typical of Western churches but this is not completely true," notes Olga Savitskaya, a candidate of art and an associate professor at the Belarusian State Music Academy's Department of Musical Theory. "After Ktesibios invented an organ in the 3rd century BC, they became secular musical instruments for a long time, played at feasts and to welcome top guests. The organ only came to Catholic churches in the 7th century."

In Belarus, the first organs appeared around 800 years ago, with organ music flourishing in the 16th-17th century. "Minsk, Brest, Grodno and Nesvizh were the largest centres of organ music, while talented Shymkevich, Mazovich and Rogachevsky not only played organs but composed music for these instruments," continues Ms. Savitskaya. "Some pieces of old Belarusian organ music are still played today: Andrey Rogachevsky's *Canzona and Matet* (composed in the 16th-17th century). In 1872, a



Oldest Belarusian organ located in Church of Saint Roch in Minsk

school of organists was established in Minsk: the only one of its kind across the whole Russian Empire."

Organ in six carriages

Concert organs appeared in the 19th century, with one of the first such instruments being made in France. In the mid-20th century, it was fashionable to make universal organs — which could perform various styles: old, modern, romantic and classical. One such is found at the Belarusian State Philharmonic, in the Large Hall; it was made by a famous

Czech firm — Rieger-Kloss — under the guidance of outstanding organist Jiří Rheinberger (celebrating his 50th birthday this year).

It is the largest organ in the country and required six carriages to transport its various parts to the Belarusian capital. It stands about 12m high and 15m wide, with four manuals and a foot-beater, 73 acoustic registers, 10 air bellows and 6,366 pipes (the smallest are about 1cm tall and have the diameter of a pencil, while the largest are around 8m, with a diameter of almost 50cm).

Doctor for 'king'

The 21st century unveiled a new page in the history of the Philharmonic organ, being revived by talented Stanislav Chernyavsky: an organ caretaker since 1963. For over four decades, he breathed in unison with the organ, being minutely aware of its character, its strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge he passed to his son, Gennady, who now takes care of the magnificent instrument. Ms. Savitskaya believes that the organ would have failed to survive without their help. Naturally, its life also relies on those willing to learn to

play. "The Minsk organ is lucky; in its 50 years of life, only three men have played it: outstanding and talented Oleg Yanchenko, Alexander Fiseisky and Konstantin Sharov. The latter has been playing the Belarusian Philharmonic organ since 1983."

The Belarusian organ and its organists have attracted attention from many prominent foreign musicians and from audiences. The Vatican's leading organist, Sacchetti, has given a guest performance on the wonderful instrument at the Philharmonic, as has Belgium's Peters, Latvia's Lisitsina, Russia's Roisman

and Grodberg, and several others.

"The Philharmonic organ combines various instruments in a wonderful manner; interestingly, it can even substitute an orchestra in such organ-based symphonies as that by French Widor and Vierne," notes Ms. Savitskaya. "The possibilities of this 'king of instruments' are endless. Poland's Marek Stefanski — who recently toured Minsk — amazed audiences with an organ tango! That was spectacular of course."

Organs with character

Two other major concert organs are to be found: at St. Roch's Roman Catholic Church in Minsk and at Polotsk's Sophia Cathedral. Although both were made in the Czech Republic, they enjoy different characters and tone. In fact, Belarus boasts around a hundred organs, of various sizes and appearances, hand-made by Italian, German and Polish masters.

Belarus' oldest organs are found in the Farny and Frantsisk Roman Catholic churches of Grodno and Budslav, as well as in the villages of Novaya Mysh (Baranovich District) and Trakeli (Voronovo District). All were made in the 18th century. Other outstanding organs are kept in Nesvizh and Pinsk, at St. Barbara's Roman Catholic Church in Vitebsk and at St. Stanislav's Roman Catholic Church in Mogilev; they are true 'kings of music'.

Radziwills' books return to ancient Nesvizh Castle

Books from the dukes' library return to former residence of Belarus' 'uncrowned kings' for a month

The *Book Legacy of the Radziwills* exhibition opened at Nesvizh Palace and Park Estate in early April, featuring 90 editions — in history, theology, law and philosophy, as well as works of fiction and periodicals. The books are usually housed at the National Library of Belarus and at the Yakub Kolas Central Research Library of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Alexander Stefanovich, who heads the Department for Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Yakub Kolas Central Research Library, tells us, "The President's Library of Belarus also owns more than a hundred books from the Radziwills' library while the National Library has about 500 editions; the Central Research Library boasts almost

3,500."

Of special interest are editions about the famous magnate family: *The Nesvizh Gallery of Radziwill Portraits* (1857) by Edward Kotlubaj; and works by representatives of the Radziwill family — such as *Peregrination* (1628) by Mikolaj Krzysztof Radziwill Sierotka.

The Radziwill Library at Nesvizh in the 17th Century was presented at the opening ceremony, continuing a series of catalogues first issued three years ago, detailing what was once the largest private library in Belarus, owned by the 'uncrowned kings'.

The Radziwill library at Nesvizh dates from the 16th century and is now dispersed through Russia, Finland, Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. Four years ago, the Radziwill archives and the Nesvizh collection of books were listed on UNESCO's World Memories Register.

Youngsters take to the fashion runway

Pupils of Minsk boarding school model teen collection by designer Lyudmila Labkova

The famous Belarusian designer's 2013/2014 autumn-winter collection has been modelled by professional models from the National Beauty School, and by pupils from one of Minsk's boarding schools. While the professional models wore the adult collection, the youngsters showed off Ms. Labkova's capsule teenage range.

According to Ms. Labkova, the teen collection was the 'zest' of the show, being comfortable to wear and easy to mix and match in various combinations. "The clothes are functional while being appropriate for both school and everyday wear," she smiles. "I've always tried to help orphans. Last year,



Lyudmila Labkova presents her new collection

children from Minsk boarding school #5 twice visited my shows as spectators. Of course, the young girls were eager to take part so, this spring, I decided to bring their dreams to life." The

youngsters were helped by a professional team of stylists while a model agency organised the staging.

The girls also received gifts from the official partners of the fashion show.

Unusual exhibition

Original project at Mogilev museum brought to life

The search for the sacred Belarusian Yevfrosiniya Polotskaya's Cross, which was lost in the early years of the Great Patriotic War, from Mogilev's Pavel Maslennikov Museum, is yet to yield results. A reproduction was created in 1997, in Polotsk, and the Pavel Maslennikov Museum now has a holographic image of the sacred item, created by Belarusian physicist Leonid Tanin and artist Valery Leunin.

The innovation allows the treasure to be viewed by an even greater number and the museum is planning a second holographic exhibition, displaying other sacred items, ancient weapons and coins and Vytautas' belt. Remarkably, Mogilev is the first city in the country to use holography in its museum.