

Songs spring forth from soul

In 1980, Valentina Gladkaya gathered together amateur singers to create *Nerush* folk group. Songs once sung by their grandparents formed their repertoire; at the time, these weren't perceived as being monuments of deep antiquity

Today, such songs, untouched by the winds of globalisation, are more often heard on stage than in rural streets. Fortunately, *Nerush* (translated from the Belarusian as 'virgin soil') is keeping those melodies alive. Ms. Gladkaya and her colleagues are reviving our national musical 'virgin soil' and have recently performed an unusual concert dedicated to 1970s rural life.

"At last, I put on a national costume!" exclaims Ms. Gladkaya, an Honoured Figure of Culture. "We've been working with students from the Belarusian State University and other universities, visiting villages to record songs, preserving all the peculiarities of local pronunciation. My task is not only to teach youngsters to perform folk songs, but to show them how to understand them. For example, the word 'chareshnya' means a woman, rather than a tree. 'A falcon is flying from chareshnya' means 'a son is born to a woman.'"

Your group exists at the BSU. Students from which departments tend to join *Nerush*?

When we began, we were joined by physicists and mathematicians and, later, doctors. Several of our members have been with us since 1980! Many have even gone on to set up their own bands; Natalia Sazanovich from the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics created 'Gamanina', but still sings with 'Nerush'. Maybe this is because we are

the only band which doesn't adjust folk songs for the stage. We perform them as they used to sound.

Times change and trends move on. When was the best time for folk bands?

When I began it was awful! All amateur groups were ordered 'from above' to wear identical costumes, as if in uniform. I strongly protested as, even in villages, each young girl would do her best to look individual. It made no sense to wear standard costumes, sewn at a factory. Perhaps the decision was made because it was cheaper for the state to provide all groups with identical costumes. I tried to raise funds to pay for alternatives. Seamstresses would bring 'demonstration-al' exhibits of Belarusian folk costume to Moscow and I'd buy them under-the-counter. We wanted to be original in everything.

Pesnyary also existed at that time, visiting villages to gather authentic materials and sewing original costumes. What was the difference between you?

They adjusted the songs. At that time, we were the only band trying to exactly copy the manner of folk singing: female and male. Today, Ivan Kirchuk is a great master and specialist in this.

How do you manage to master all the peculiarities of each folk song?

First, we divide the musical parts into notes. For the last fifteen years, I've used a cassette or a CD to record

the singing; we listen up to a hundred times. Sometimes, we can learn songs by mouth. This is the only true way to learn the manner of performance, catching even the breathing of an original performer. Of course, it would be wonderful to live for some time among rural singers, but this is just impossible...

From where did your passion for folk songs originate?

I studied academic singing at the Cultural and Educational College and was appointed to work in the village of Zakalnoe in the Lyuban District. I realised that no one in the villages needed academic singing, as they already sang from their souls. I decided to leave and enter the Culture University's Folk Department, which had just opened at that time.

I hail from the Kopyl District's village of Presnaki, where my grandmother used to sing me Kolyady and wedding songs. I've been influenced by their magical power since early childhood. When I perform these songs at concerts, people fall asleep. For a long time, I couldn't understand why. Then, I understood that this traditional manner of singing places us in a trance, like meditation. It wasn't that people were bored! I noticed that the melodies of our songs were somehow similar to Buddhist mantras, in which sounds come through the 'third eye' — at the bridge of the nose — rather than through the mouth. They fly directly from the top of the



Valentina Gladkaya revives folk melodies

head. It's a technique still being investigated; singing boasts its own mysteries.

Eventhe songs performed at Eurovision? I remember that, in 2007, *Nerush* took part in the selection round for this contest...

Of course, I mean high singing. I'll never forget seeing Zurab Sotkilava on stage for the first time. I was greatly astonished by his small height and undistinguished appear-

ance. However, as soon as he opened his mouth and sang, he immediately rose in my eyes by 2m. He became handsome like no other, due to the power of his voice.

Does someone's voice make them beautiful, as well as their appearance?

Voices mirror our inner world. At first, a person may seem quite ordinary. As soon as they begin to speak, you immediately 'fall in love' with them.

You're currently preparing a musical. How does this contemporary genre relate to traditional songs?

A 'musical' is the contemporary title for what has always existed. 'Tsar Maximilian' — the Kolyady custom, which has become famous worldwide due to Semezhevo village in my native Kopyl District — is a musical performance. It includes songs, dances and live sound. 'Nerush' has recently presented a musical performance dedicated to 1970s rural life, with ritual songs, dances, jokes and love scenes. We didn't invent anything new; we just followed tradition.

Were traditional customs still alive in villages in the 1970s?

In our village, teenagers still go carol-singing and sing *Shchedry Vecher* (Generous Evening) songs while visiting each home. Hosts present them with gifts. If they don't, young boys can close the chimney with a glass sheet so the house fills with smoke. They might even take the gates off. *Shchedry Vecher* is only one custom and is more than merely a game. This holiday teaches people to be generous and share everything with their neighbours.

Once, your band was the only one with such a repertoire. Now, some others exist. How do you differ from them?

Many groups work hard to become popular; they wouldn't be able to give concerts otherwise. Their songs are modernised. We're an amateur band, despite our titles, so we're free to be always faithful to authenticity. We have no need to court commercial popularity.

By Victor Andreyev

Peaceful atom of artist Monica Lemeshonok

By Sergey Kulakov

Exhibition of paintings and drawings by young Mogilev artist Monica Lemeshonok opens at Mogilev's Regional Art Museum

The project was planned seven years ago, before being gradually brought to life. The atom in Monica's artworks symbolises creation, renewal and spring, with most created in her favourite impressionist style. Her pieces boast plenty of light, joyful emotions and a sunny mood.

"Each stroke of my pen or brush symbolises the atom, from which the outside world consists. I wanted to show it moving, as a symbol of eternal life, reflected in our surrounding nature. I try to depict people in my drawings, their understanding and perception of the atom; they can be so diverse," noted the artist, chatting to journalists on the eve of the exhibition opening.

This is the 19th personal exhibition for the 24 year old painter, who holds a scholarship from the Presidential



Monica Lemeshonok's works boast a special colour palette

Special Fund for Support of the Talented Youth. She has won Mogilev Regional Executive Committee's special award and her works are kept in private collections and galleries in Belarus, Russia, Germany, France, Japan,

Mexico, Canada and Brazil. Many professional artists view Ms. Lemeshonok's works as being unique in their use of colour and in their technique. Movement and volume bring her pictures alive, while having

original composition and strong creativity.

Sadly, Monica has been unable to walk since childhood. However, she remains optimistic, devoting most of her free time to her creativity.

From Gothic to Empire style

Façade restoration of manor in Gomel Region's Krasny Bereg village — a 19th architectural monument — to be complete in 2011, with half already finished and the roofing changed

The unique interiors are currently undergoing restoration; according to historians, the rooms, cabinets and halls in the manor boasted decoration in Gothic, Renaissance, Romanesque and even Arab styles. Ogee window apertures and chimneys on water piping are in the Gothic style, as are the entrance gates to the estate. Rococo, Mannerism, Empire and French Classicism styles are located around the property (ten in all) making it a true illustrative encyclopaedia of architectural interiors.