

Festivity prevails at the junction of three borders

Our correspondent visits unusual youth festival of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine — *Slavonic Unity*

By Andrey Novikovskiy

Traditionally, the *Slavonic Unity* Festival is held where the Gomel, Bryansk and Chernigov regions meet; there's a small lake, into which runs a small stream from a copse. Some say it is the remains of the semi-mythical River Zhiveda. According to local legend, the brothers Veselin, Yurko and Senko laid the foundation of our three nations there: Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian. Being injured in battle, the Slavonic brothers washed their faces in the small river and immediately recovered, as the water had healing powers. Afterwards, each founded a village: Belarusian Veselovka, Russian Yurkovich and Ukrainian Senkovka.

It would seem unlikely that young people from our three republics would have attached great importance to the story in choosing the location in 1969. Since then, the event has become a huge international festival, gathering thousands in late June. The location is just a coincidence yet it's difficult not to notice the symbolism.

This year, the international tent camp (located between century-old villages) brought together over 2,500 guests — more than ever before. All regions of Belarus, as well as many from Russia and Ukraine, were represented near the Friendship Monument. This time, Belarus was the host country.

The organisers didn't leave time for idleness, filling the



Slavonic Unity Festival brings creative fun to all

three days easily. Boredom was impossible, with youngsters meeting old friends and acquiring new ones. Contests and tournaments were held throughout, with participants able to represent their own region and country. There was a newspaper to release and 1980s and 2000s themed discos. Each had its own national centre to be visited and a swim in the famous lake was obligatory! This is possible at the neutral sec-

tion between borders for only four days a year. Interestingly, three currencies are used at the fair too. Everyone at the event has the chance to 'experience' a little of life in their neighbours' states.

Guests of high standing took part, including the Patriarch of Moscow and All-Russia, who arrived by helicopter to conduct a festive prayer service and welcome those attending. He called on everyone

to appreciate their unique unity and shared history — despite cultural and national differences, saying, "At the junction of our states, we feel our historical unity especially acutely. We originate from the same root and trunk, having lived long as a unified state. However, our nations have developed independently, with unique cultures, languages and customs. Our diversity is to be treasured. Three powerful branches have

grown from a single tree; we should remember that various branches can each yield fruit. Of course, our nations' history goes beyond a few dozen years, stretching back millennia. We also share our Orthodox faith and common moral values. Without this unity, we'd fail to have a successful future."

This year, the festival was held under the motto: 'The Future Belongs to the Young'. Curiously, at the opening cer-

emony, there were three sheets of paper with these words written on them, fixed together, bearing the inscriptions: 'Belarus', 'Russia' and 'Ukraine'.

Vladimir Dvornik, the Chairman of the Gomel Regional Executive Committee, welcomed guests and Belarusians, emphasising, "There are many events worldwide where countries meet. However, I'm confident that none other displays the unity of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine; our Slavonic brotherhood is more precious than treasures. The tradition to meet at the Friendship Monument each year unites increasing numbers of people."

He was echoed by the Governor of the Bryansk Region, Nikolay Denin, who asserted, "This holiday isn't given to us from on high; it is organised by the people themselves. Our contemporary Slavonic world has changed, becoming more pragmatic. We live in various states but share much in common: mutual sympathy, strong ties and historical memories. Moreover, our economic ties are growing stronger; turnover between the Bryansk Region and Belarus totalled \$580m last year."

The guests referred repeatedly to our shared historical memories, noting that no similar situation is seen elsewhere in the world, so it would be a waste not to use its economic, cultural and political opportunities. The Ukrainians used the word 'union' no less frequently than the Belarusians and Russians.

Whose garland is better?

By Nikolay Davidov

The *Garland*, as a Symbol of Festivities and as a Gift to Festival exhibition of decorative and applied arts has opened at the Georgy Poplavsky Art Museum in Bobruisk

It presents 23 works by art groups, as shown at the 10th International Festival of Folk Art: *Garland of Friendship*.

One garland, from Turkey, deserves special attention, being in the shape of an amulet, decorated over a very long period of time. It won the Grand Prize — established by the Turks. The Department of Culture at Bobruisk City Executive Committee tells us that all the works presented at the event are to go on display throughout the entire local history museum.

Unusual exhibition complements theatrical performance based on one of old plays

State Museum of the History of Theatrical and Musical Culture offers age of Ursula Radziwill

The *Miracle about Ursula* exhibition, dedicated to the creativity of Ursula Radziwill (the founder of the first courtyard theatre in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) has launched at the State Museum of Theatrical and Musical Culture.

The title is symbolic since, in medieval times, a miracle play explored religious wonders; today's exhibition aims to show the world with different eyes. Moreover, its title corresponds to the name of a performance from the show, given by the Radziwilovsky Puppet Theatre. This details the history of the first play



Scene from the performance

written by Ursula Radziwill: *Quick-witted Love*. The show is performed inside a small theatrical box, using puppets and special cut outs

of key characters.

Three portable puppet theatres are on show at the exhibition: the Nesvizh Town Hall Theatre; and

those of the Radziwilovsky and Kredene theatres. In addition, visitors can view the home puppet theatre of Anna Vygonnaya, who

heads the Mirskaya Batleika Folk Studio and Mir Castle Batleika Theatre. Moreover, some theatrical costumes and sets from *Mir Mirages*, *Castle Chimneys*, *Mir's Centre* and *A Stone Dove* are on show — all created by the Mirskaya Batleika Theatre (at the Mir Technical College for Art and Restoration).

Ursula Radziwill set up her theatre in Nesvizh in 1746 and performances were staged by her family eight to twelve times a year — for holidays. She wrote 16 plays, including prominent comedies such as *Love — An Interested Judge* and *Fortune's Game*, alongside tragedies such as *The Madden Judge*, *Gold on Fire* and the opera *Happy Misfortune*.