

# When orchestra is a family

Belarus' State Chamber Orchestra celebrates 45th anniversary

By Irina Akulovich

The troupe has toured almost every corner of Europe and, not long ago, performed on Italy's top stages, accompanying outstanding pianist Eliso Virsaladze. Over the years, Svyatoslav Rikhter, Mikhail Rostropovich, Victor Tretyakov, Mikhail Pletnev, Paul Badura-Shkoda and Yuri Basmeth have performed with the Orchestra. Meanwhile, several world premieres have been prepared under the guidance of Honoured Artist of Russia Yevgeny Bushkov — the Orchestra's Artistic Head and Chief Conductor.

Mr. Bushkov shares his thoughts on the achievements of the State Chamber Orchestra.

**Is 45 years a notable anniversary?**

*From a musical point of view, not particularly, although the troupe is viewed as 'elderly'. However, I hope that we can still rouse listeners' emotions and send powerful messages.*

**When did you meet the troupe?**

*In 2007, I was invited to Minsk and was surprised by the Orchestra's vitality. The musicians were so passionate that I couldn't refuse the invitation to work with them. Being part of an orchestra is like family life, with its mutual interests. Without unity, it's bet-*



State Chamber Orchestra performs classic works across Europe

*ter to disband, keeping hold of good memories.*

**What was the Orchestra like at that time?**

*It was on an emotional high. I felt as if they had been waiting for me and were pinning great hopes on me. It was a priceless feeling and called on professionalism which could hardly be realized immediately. Over the years, I'd belonged to chamber orchestras of the highest level. I was*

*lucky that the Orchestra was at the top of its game when I joined. Four years on, it's hard for me to evaluate my contribution, since it's long enough to have achieved something yet too early to draw conclusions. In this respect, it's useful for me to step back every now and again, to be objective.*

**What difficulties do you face as the Orchestra's Artistic Head and Chief Conductor?**

*The difficulties remain unchanged, being financial.*

**What are the concerns and traditions of the State Chamber Orchestra?**

*Our traditions are based on our native Belarusian conscientious work ethic and our collective sense of self-worth. This is rare in modern times and should always go hand in hand with placing strict demands on oneself. Each of our musicians knows*

*that he or she is a member of an elite troupe.*

**How has the Orchestra transformed since your arrival?**

*We've progressed but I can hardly assess the degree objectively. Our membership has changed slightly as, over the past six months, several young musicians have joined us. I'm pleased, since it brings strength, energy and vitality*

## Running order determined

**Alena Lanskaya to perform 11th at Eurovision first semi-finals**

Belarus' official representative at the international *Eurovision-2013* song contest, Alena Lanskaya, is to perform in the first semi-finals on May 14th, singing her *Solayoh* composition in 11th place.

This year, instead of a traditional draw, the organisers have determined the order of the singers' performance themselves, ensuring that every two lyrical artists are followed by a group, to keep the dynamics of the show flowing. "We want each song to shine," notes *Eurovision's* Executive Producer, Jon Ola Sand.

*Eurovision-2013* is being hosted by Swedish Malmö from May 14th-18th. In the first semi-finals, Austria is to kick off the performances, followed by Estonia, Slovenia, Croatia, Denmark, Russia, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Montenegro, Lithuania, Belarus, Moldova, Ireland, Cyprus, Belgium and Serbia. The second semi-final is scheduled for May 16th, with Latvia, San Marino, Macedonia, Azerbaijan, Finland, Malta, Bulgaria, Iceland, Greece, Israel, Armenia, Hungary, Norway, Albania, Georgia, Switzerland and Romania performing.

Italy, Spain, Germany, France and the UK (as organising countries) alongside Sweden will enter the finals automatically, being held on May 18th.

# Songs infused with May dew

Brest Region's folklore groups successfully present themselves to foreign neighbours

By Yuri Chernyakevich

...Yelena Bukach begins to sing a song which she has known since early childhood, having listened to her mother and grandmother sing the melody. The Kobrin District's village of Magdalin is known for its beautiful singing but few would have imagined that these melodic Polesie motifs would find an audience in the Polish trans-border area. Yelena has travelled to the Bialystok area's Bielsk Podlaski many times, joined by other members of the *Zaranitsa* song and music ensemble. When she sees audiences enjoying their performances, listening attentively and thanking with their applause, she can't hold back her tears.

Those who attend *Zaranitsa's* concerts love hearing familiar melodies, joining in with songs recalled from their own younger days. Meanwhile, the group's recent performance in Poland saw them end with a Polish folk song (at the audience's request); every member of the audience joined in singing the poetic lyrics, raising their voices to the sky.

Traditional Belarusian Polesie songs are extremely melodic, like an ancient chant, as heard over the Pripyat River hundreds of years ago.

It's wonderful that such Polesie traditions are being revived, bringing delight to audiences in Belarus and beyond.

At present, Brest's Regional Public and Cultural Centre is involved in popularising folk traditions, helping folk groups in the region gain a platform for performing to tourists and touring abroad.

Jointly with partners from the Bialystok Voivodeship, the Centre has been organising folklore and ethnographic expeditions to collect information on ancient songs, dances and village rituals in the Pruzhany, Drogichin, Kobrin and other districts across the Brest Region. Meanwhile, our Polish friends have invited bands from the Brest Region to visit the Bialystok Region, where many ethnic Belarusians live. Members of groups are welcome abroad, being offered great hospitality.

In my opinion, the most successful project being run by the Kobrin District Executive Committee's Culture Department involves international co-operation. During the recent *There, Along May Dew* Folk Festival, Kobrin groups toured the Bialystok Region, presenting traditional customs and organising joint evenings of song with residents of



Zaranitsa ensemble already well known in Bielsk Podlaski

Polish villages. Organised by cultural employees from Kobrin, in close co-operation with the Muzeum Małej Ojczyzny w Studziwodach (Museum of the Little Fatherland), the festival did a wonderful job of promoting the traditional culture of Polesie.

"Of course, such tours enhance the prestige of our ensembles and attract youngsters to them," notes the Head of the Kobrin District Executive Committee's Culture Department, Nadezhda Zhuk. "This is a real foundation for preserving folk traditions and an opportunity to widely promote them."

The strongest and most friendly ties have been established between Brest folk bands and those from the Bialystok Region, especially from Bielsk Podlaski. Museum Director Doroteusz Fionik tells us, "Our contacts began back in the 1990s. The first Polish-Belarusian expedition was organised around a decade ago; our joint field research resulted in the release of a book and materials being published in the Belarusian and Polish media, alongside the recording of discs."

Mr. Fionik is known across Poland and Belarus for his work as an historian, ethnographer and folk-

lore researcher. Hailing from Bielsk Podlaski, he has made many trips to Polesie and Podlasie villages to gather source material. He tends to visit every two months, accompanying folk groups from the Bialystok area. He also invites groups from the Brest Region to his own home town. His museum displays works by masters from Belarus, such as Nikolay Tarasyuk and Ivan Suprunchik; soon, it will be hosting its regular folklore festival. Mr. Fionik explains, "In early May, we'll be again organising our festival but we plan a much larger event next year, when we celebrate 450 years since the Bielsk Privilege was declared for our town, during the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian Sejm. In 1566, the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian was also approved. We are planning a city-wide holiday involving knights and historical clubs from Poland and Belarus; I'm confident it will be a success."

Clearly, with so much forward planning, the event cannot fail to be magnificent. Belarusian knight groups will be pleased to take part and international co-operation between the Brest Region and Bialystok Voivodeship will certainly continue.