

PERM NEWS

The newsletter of the Perm Association

October 2007

Carmina Burana

In late summer, audiences at Oxford Town Hall gave standing ovations at the end of two stunning fully staged performances of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Orff believed that music should begin in movement, and *Carmina Burana* was written with mimed action in mind.

Carmina Burana – a musical setting of 13th century verses in mediaeval Latin and German dialect – presents a challenge to performers, because of the unfamiliar language, shifting rhythms and high vocal register. All the more remarkable, then, that most of these performers were young people from most of Oxford's twin towns.



The players of the Leiden Youth Orchestra, mature beyond their years, provided the musical accompaniment with the professional skill that Oxford audiences have come to expect after the same forces performed Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* two years ago.

The young singers of the Carl von Ossietzky Gymnasium Choir in Bonn and the Academic Choir of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland – their ranks swelled by the adult singers of the Vocal Interlude Ensemble from Grenoble, Bonn choir parents and East Oxford Community Choir - performed the astonishing feat of singing the

whole piece without a vocal score. Would that more English choirs would attempt to do likewise since this, also, was what Orff intended!

Each movement of the work was accompanied by dances choreographed by Cecilia Macfarlane and ably performed by dancers from the Perm Youth Dance Company and the Oxford Youth Dance Company, both featuring and blending their originally very different styles. The subtlety of the choreography was exemplified by "O Fortuna". The words and music of the first and last movements are identical – but here the choreography of the two was differentiated. The opening chorus featured a static tableau, but in the closing reprise the dancers and younger singers drove and were driven by a monstrous rotating wheel of fortune.

Soloist Byron Jackson was master of the huge vocal range demanded by the baritone part; counter-tenor Adrian Boorman was unearthly as the roasting swan; and soprano Louise Lloyd gave a sweet rendering of the lyrical songs, such as "In trutina".

This was a real tour de force, brought to fruition in less than a week of working together in Oxford by conductor John Lubbock, who kept tight control through all the constant changes of dynamics, rhythm and tempo. Founder of the Orchestra of St John's Smith Square, John also has vast experience of working with young people and community orchestras and choirs.

Huge credit must also go to Oxford City International Officer May Wylie, who managed all the project organisation, including accommodation, food and transport for more than 240 performers.

This was an experience to treasure, not only for the appreciative audiences but also for the large number of young performers who did such creative work in collaboration with like-minded partners from eastern, central and western Europe.

Richard Sills

Putin and the Restoration of Russia

In my first two articles on "What Russians think of Putin", I quoted from teachers' letters to illustrate what they admired and what made them angry or fearful – or resigned. In this third article I use the replies to examine a different issue: What should be the President's role?

In the Russian presidential system, the President holds much of the political power *and* is head of state. By separating these roles into Prime Minister and Monarch, we in Britain do not assume that we ought to respect our current political leader, whereas for Russians who have always had a Tsar or a Soviet Tsar-substitute, patriotic duty is directed towards the political head. Pictures of Putin hang in official offices and in institutes across the country. His

image is not omnipresent, but it is taken for granted – because the President embodies the country (as, for many people, the Queen embodies our nation).

Hence the passionate relief that here is a man who does not make Russians feel humiliated in the eyes of the world. The Russians do not blindly believe in their leaders; many respondents said that they were themselves surprised at their current feelings about Putin. *I do respect our president but I think that a president is not a person with real political power, there might be some forces behind. Anyway, a president is definitely a face of the country and I believe Putin has been playing this role perfectly.*

Or: Not everything that was expected has been done. But being a

teacher I do not have a right to say bad things about our country, and about the president because he is the face of it. The future generations that we teach should respect Russia and be patriots. And we, teachers, should do everything to instill this quality in our pupils/students.

Since the President is simultaneously a political person whose policies are available for criticism (there were many attacks on his educational reforms) and an exemplar of national values, the Russians can be as aware as cynical Westerners of *presentation* as a key to political respect. But then they can make careful distinctions. *He doesn't speak much, he rather reigns than rules the country and derives merits. I think it is rather a wise policy of his political image makers. Never mind what is on the surface, the most important thing is that he sticks to the universal values and does his best.* (Or – We can see that he is groomed for office; but he is still a serious moral person.)

Are they deluding themselves by investing Putin not so much with political shrewdness as with special virtue? Some fear so: *I think it is pretty dangerous to present his figure as a model (the way it is being done at large in Russia): the fact that he got presidency from somebody else's hands (Yeltsin being a notorious figure), with no proper political and human experience encourages many unworthy people to pursue a similar course.*

Many others suspected that while he made an excellent Head of State, 'hidden forces' were controlling him politically. Consequently, as they stood back and judged Putin, it was not so much his political policies that engaged them as two aspects of his public role. First, does he, the President, really care for ordinary Russians? Many said 'Yes': *It seems that the president thinks more about people than about the way to earn*

money. Many said 'No': My mistrust to Russian authority as such would not let me believe in the president's responsibility to the people.

Neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin is seen as a leader who cared about ordinary people; Gorbachev managed to destroy a way of life, an economy and a country; Yeltsin let anarchy rip through the tattered fabric of daily survival. By contrast, perhaps Putin is trying to sew together some of the pieces. To do this he has to have some strong national threads.

This is the teachers' second theme. They are searching for national *values*, both for the students they teach and for themselves.

I like the fact that Putin tries to find national ideas and patterns. During the 1990s there appeared a generation without any ideals except money. They don't believe in anybody or in anything. and he tries to find an idea that people may believe.

Many in the West see this as a return to 'Soviet' thinking; with one or two exceptions, the teachers are sure that his efforts are directed towards building Russia, not the Soviet Union.

What he has done is to put back some frames into our minds. Not the Soviet frames, but new ones. There was a problem with Yeltsin – his freedom meant that everyone could be free in their own way in their own place. There was nothing to hold people together. So Putin has tried to put a Russian frame in our minds. Can we think of ourselves as Russians? Can we work together, and even restrain ourselves as Russians? I understand his idea and I think it's right. Yeltsin's freedom – well it made us more free and more wild. Now we are less free, but Putin is trying to make us a nation.

Karen Hewitt

Dates for your diary

Pasternak Trust

Not a Perm Association event; but members ought to know that on the first Sunday of every month, pictures by Leonid Pasternak, the Russian impressionist painter and father of Boris, are on display from 2.00pm to 4.00pm at the Pasternak family home at 20 Park Town, Oxford. Viewing by arrangement with the family, on telephone 01865 515994.

Seminars on Putin

Also not a Perm Association event – but may well be of interest to students of Russian current affairs. Seminars are held on Mondays at 5.00 pm at St Antony's College. Remaining dates are November 5, 12, 19 and 26.

November 14 - University Exchange

We welcome teachers from Perm, who arrive on 10 November on the return leg of the university exchange. There will be a party to welcome them in the Acland Room at Rewley House at 7.30pm on Wednesday 14th November, and members are welcome to invite them out in the evening or at weekends.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Perm Association will be held on 13 February 2008, probably at Wolfson College, Linton Road, Oxford,. We have invited Judy Pallot to give a talk on 'Women prisoners in Russia'.

Oxford International Links News

Remembrance Day

Delegates from all the link cities will be attending the Remembrance Day Ceremony in St Giles on Sunday 11th November.

Oxfam Fair

OIL will hire stalls at both the Oxfam One World Fair in the Town Hall on Saturday 17th November and the Green Fair on Saturday 8th December. The purpose is to raise funds and also the profile of the links. It's hoped that Bonn will have sweet things, Leiden will have waffles and bulbs, Grenoble and Perm some suitably French and Russian produce and souvenirs, and Leon a selection of jewellery.

Proceeds will go to OIL to subsidise the next twin cities joint project (with Leon income direct to Leon).

If you can contribute merchandise either get it to May Wylie's office at the Town Hall in advance, or bring it to the stall. If you can help mind a stall, ideally 3pm-5pm on either day, please let Ann Davis know via email: annharvarddavis45@hotmail.com

St Patrick's Night

There will be an OIL fundraising event "St Patrick's Night" at North Oxford Community Centre on 14th March 2008.

News of other links

Bonn

A group of about 60 people is due to visit Bonn in late October for celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the Oxford-Bonn link. Participants include the Oxford Bonn Group, Oxford Fiddlers, Swinging Rainbow and Oxford Community School.

Grenoble

The Oxford Grenoble Association is looking forward to celebrating the 20th anniversary of the link with Grenoble.

Leon

36 people took part in a sponsored swim in June, raising about £1200 to support the second phase of a water project in Leon.

A Russian Year

The blanket melts to mush, a grubby grimy slushy time, brought to decision on subbotnik, when all is swept and tidied, painted and renewed, spring bursts forth in wild abandon, colour and warmth and nature wake, remake in generous abundance. Soon the rewards of winter work are reaped - summer holidays, country time and dacha days and then - the harvest of the forest, berries galore and many many mushrooms. Suddenly silently the first snows, and soon the wind has whisked away the leaves and all is bare; the winter lies thick and crisp, a deep sleep upon the countryside, hard and dangerous to the unwary but so beautiful. Mother Russia rests her children to await the spring.

Philip Clayton

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Perm people

As much as I had been looking forward to the Perm experience in September, the prospect was also somewhat daunting since it meant leaving my comfort zone; but I need not have worried. A packed fortnight followed and I returned enthusiastic, nurtured and humbled - humbled in particular by the impact of learning a little about some of the people we met.

Generosity followed us wherever we went: a surprise meal and a massive jar of home-made blackberry jam (to take home!) urged upon us by an elderly lady who had previously offered us the use of her banya; little books of Pushkin epigrams, passed round with the ice-creams after supper; delicate enamels and biscuits pressed into our hands after a visit to a friend's mother; and the gift of her own souvenir from the ice caves together with a bowl of wild strawberries from our host's neighbour, whom we barely knew. It was overwhelming.

Although my own Russian was limited, our host spoke perfect English, so that, through her as translator, we were able to indulge in touching, funny and revealing conversations with her friends (who quickly became our friends), normally around the table in the kitchen, where the dictionary – and a box of chocolates ('good for the brain') – always held centre stage. We laughed and talked for hours, in a way that I would never have done at home; it was a mutual, enthusiastic and spontaneous exchange, which proved very therapeutic for me, the therapist!

For the most part, these friends had two or even three jobs. The paediatrician/anaesthetist with whom we spent some time, also worked in hospital administration and for a computer company, in order to boost his salary. His frustration was evident, but we remember him most for his kindness, his laughter, his stand-up comic routine, his bravado at the cold-water stage of the banya, and the tenderness with which he imbued poignant Russian songs during several karaoke sessions. He explained, as we laughed uncontrollably at yet another of his tales, that he played the joker in this way to retain his sanity. Cynicism might otherwise reduce him to tears.

For many of the outings organised by the university, we were accompanied by four charming and accomplished students of English who acted as our interpreters, hungry for any opportunity to practise their English. One of these, Svetlana, agreed ('with pleasure') to help me during a visit to a Russian artist. Since I knew the artist's English was limited and my Russian inadequate, I really wanted to make the most of this occasion. Svetlana's unobtrusive, instantaneous translation certainly enriched the afternoon. I could never have learned so much about the artist, her work, her techniques, her life - and her sorrows - on my own. To cap it all, we were given a little preview of the exhibition she is planning later this year. As we said our goodbyes, Svetlana broke down in tears because she felt so privileged and grateful to have been allowed to be part of that meeting. We did too.

Our host's love of and enthusiasm for English were evident. During our stay, her students in the English department at the university had eventually to ask her to slow down when she taught them - we had given her a chance to practise and she had seized it wholeheartedly! We spent a convivial evening translating a child's board book into English and discovering that Russian cows, goats and ducks speak a very different language from their English counterparts. As we packed on the last day, I had difficulty accommodating everything we had been given, so I left some books behind for my host, including my, by now, well-thumbed dictionary. Touched, she held this to her heart and whispered: 'very valuable'.

Her desire to nurture, feed and protect us was paramount. I certainly felt I was coming 'home' after each day's activity. As she opened the door, there would always be something on offer: 'Some tea perhaps?', 'Chocolates and champagne?' or one occasion 'some pies?', this after we had earlier eaten a substantial meal! She also wanted to be

sure we were safe at all times. Her parents, we discovered early on, had very sadly died in unexpected, tragic circumstances. Despite this disaster she always managed to exude energy and vitality, laughing as she refused to give us ideas for the gift we wanted to offer her. She had everything she needed, she explained mischievously.

I discovered much about myself while I was in Russia. Our host's parting words were: 'I love life!' I learned to do that in Perm and came home determined to study Russian properly and plan a return trip.

Jay Miller

Holy places

As a postgraduate geographer whose degree hinges on next year's fieldwork in Perm', I approached my first, two-week trip to the city in September with a rather desperate determination to make the most of it. There was travel-induced exhaustion and culture shock (you can read about Russia for years, but nothing but spending time there lets you appreciate how wonderful yet endlessly baffling it can be), and I was constantly worried that I would discover something to undermine all my previous research. Much to my relief, however, the trip was a success, with much useful information to be found and amazingly helpful people to be met.

My doctoral research is concerned with the experience of holy places (both Russian Orthodox and Islamic) since the end of the Soviet period. To that end, I shall be investigating the attitudes of worshippers, clergy and others to the restoration of religious sites destroyed, neglected or converted to a secular function, aiming particularly to ascertain whether this may be perceived as a process redemptive of the places themselves. The study also includes new places of worship built for commemorative purposes, and the degree to which religion and the places in which it is practised may be involved in addressing and memorialising the Soviet and pre-Soviet past.

Assuring myself that my chosen fieldwork area of Perm' would offer fertile ground for such investigations was a major aim of my visit, and so I spent a fortnight in fascinated exploration, wandering the city streets by myself for the most part, but also being taken by my host family to several sites in nearby villages (you don't know real driving until you've gone bucketing down a Russian country road with potholes like dinosaur footprints; it's great), and discussing possible lines of enquiry with those in the know at the former Communist Party archives and the human rights organisation Memorial.

A number of places particularly stood out as ones to focus on in my research. I had read about the Cathedral Mosque long before I visited it, about how it had been built in the early 1900s with the support of wealthy local merchants when the Muslim population grew too large for the little prayer houses dotted around the city, and about how it was closed in 1937 and from 1939 to 1986 was used to house the archives of the regional Communist Party. I wonder, given the maxim that "once a mosque, always a mosque", how that was taken by local Muslims – their greatest place of worship not only closed but directly utilised by representatives of an atheist power? Now, however, the mosque is open again, and it was a thrill to see and photograph a place I had been looking at for months on a laptop screen, now suddenly real, its golden crescents gleaming and enticing scents drifting from the halal stalls clustered outside. If one looks westwards down ulitsa Ordzhonikidze,

the great green-and-white mosque, one of the ubiquitous Lukoil headquarters, and the Sludskaya church present themselves from left to right: Islam, Capitalism and Orthodoxy, not quite shoulder-to-shoulder, but enough, for good or ill, to make a Bolshevik twitch, all the same.



A Sunday was spent exploring the villages to the south of the city, with their log houses and woodsmoke and neat gardens, and their often startling churches; to me, accustomed to the modest stone kirks of the west of Scotland, the presence, in a settlement of a few hundred souls, of brightly painted walls and golden cupolas, was distinctly incongruous. The Aleksandr Nevsky church, in the village of Lobanovo, is an imposing red-brick structure, and its vast silvery domes caught a gleam even from the

dull and drizzling day on which I visited. This church did not operate for long after its 1914 foundation before being closed down and the building used as a greenhouse. In the 1970s, it was converted into a restaurant. The 1990s saw it returned to the Church and eventually restored, but its rehabilitation, as it were, was not to be so simple; according to my hosts, many older people in Lobanovo consider the place to be unholy now, as it was "touched by fire" during its years as a restaurant. They prefer, therefore, to travel more than ten kilometres to go to church elsewhere. For these people, re-consecration was clearly not enough; is there anything that would render the Lobanovo church holy for them once more? Does this mean that there are some places which simply cannot be "redeemed"? Are there any other Soviet-era uses of a church which might have been considered particularly offensive? For me, these answers are all to find.

I am genuinely glad that I shall be returning to Perm' in the near future. I loved Moscow and St Petersburg, but my brief visits there have felt like fairytales out of a travel brochure; two weeks largely on my own in Perm' allowed me to get a little way under its skin - only a little, with my currently limited Russian, but enough to get some sense of place, which, for a geographer, is what it is all about. I look forward to my next visit.

Victoria Arnold

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