



# PERM NEWS

О Р А

Oxford Perm Association

Newsletter January 2020

## Art and icons in Perm

*Joanna Tulloch*

When applying to go to Perm, I had expressed a particular interest in art, especially icons, so the organizers had arranged two specialist visits for me: one to the home of an artist and the other to the icon-painting studio of the Holy Trinity Monastery of St Stefan. Both were fascinating.

The first visit was to the home of artist Lyudmila Ivanovna Kravchenko, who has been making enamels, paintings, graphic art, and icons for more than 50 years. Born in Ukraine, she came to Perm in 1970 and was at the forefront of the development of artistic jewellery in the Kama region.

The range of her work was breathtaking – from the tiniest miniature plates painted in enamels with microscopic designs fit for a doll's house to large paintings in oil, acrylic, or watercolour, and from delicate jewellery to strikingly modern icons.

All her expertise in enamels had to be learned by experimentation: from forging the copper base to painting on the ground glass to firing in a kiln. She now has to store her equipment in her small flat, since she has no separate studio.



In August she had a personal retrospective entitled ‘Co-authored by fire’. Her work is deeply spiritual, whether it is an icon or a secular object. I was most impressed by the vibrancy and modernity of her icons, which are also enamels, for example *The Miracle of St George* (2019). As Aleksandr Peskov wrote in the exhibition brochure, ‘Each of her works is a complex polyphony of thoughts, feelings, sensations, reflections of the artist’s inner world – deep, multi-textured, and hidden behind the surface of an enamel picture.’

The visit to the icon-painting studio took place towards the end of our time in Perm (although we had earlier briefly visited the monastery church). We were met by Father Alipiy, head of the Icon-painting Department of the Perm Seminary, who is named after the first icon painter of Kievan Rus. He took us to the monastery church, where he showed us the statue of St Stefan of Perm, which stands by the door. Inside he explained the purpose and significance of each tier of the iconostasis, which had recently been furnished with newly painted icons from the studio. He also pointed out some significant icons in the interior, including one in memory of the ‘new martyrs’ of Perm (those dissidents who had died during the Soviet period).

Next we went to a separate department housing the studio. Father Alipiy showed us how an icon is made, starting with the wooden panel and explaining each stage of construction, using all the elements of creation – vegetable (in the panel itself, the linen cloth that is applied to the first layer of gesso, and the oil used in the final varnish), animal (in the rabbit-skin glue in the gesso and the egg that is mixed with powdered pigments to make the paint), and mineral (in the gold of the background and haloes, the chalk or alabaster in the gesso, and the pigments themselves). The process of painting was somewhat different from what I was used to in the West: minute amounts of tempera and pigment were mixed at any one time, using a syringe to add a drop or two of tempera to each separate pigment.

We noticed that many of the students in the icon school were young women – although it is a men’s monastery, female students come from all over Russia to study here. We saw their work on new icons and restoration of old ones. They had also frescoed the refectory walls.

## **FANTASTIC PLASTIC - An exhibition at Perm Museum of Modern Art (PERMM)**

*Liz Wheeler and John Hind*

Shortly before our recent visit to Perm we discovered that an exhibition, *Fantastic Plastic*, was showing at Perm Museum of Modern Art (PERMM). The exhibition featured works made from recycled plastic. As participants of the Oxford Perm Exchange, both coincidentally interested in plastic recycling, we asked if a visit to the museum could be arranged. We were grateful that the museum opened its doors especially for us on a day that it is normally closed, so we and the five other members of our exchange group were able to have a private view. We were accompanied by Anatoly from Perm State University and guided by Dmitry from the museum.

Organised by Moscow Design museum and SIBUR (Russia’s largest petrochemical company), the exhibition featured design objects made from recycled plastics by Russian and foreign designers. The exhibition was curated by Alexandra Sankova and Olga Druzhinina, Development Director of the Moscow Design Museum.

The exhibition was held on the top floor of the museum. Formerly a tram depot, the wedge shape of the building presented some challenges for displaying works. Works were displayed in glass vitrines, and were supplemented by photographs of additional works, all made from recycled plastic. Some of us were disappointed that many objects were represented by photographs, but Dmitry explained that the exhibition had been held at three venues, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod and Perm, and exhibits had been shared between the locations.

Before showing us the works, Dmitry talked about the history of the museum. PERMM opened its doors in 2009, and is the only state supported contemporary art museum outside Moscow. It was at the forefront of Perm's so called "Cultural Revolution", which saw contemporary public art such as Nikolay Pollitsky's massive birch log arch in the shape of a Russian P, and Boris Matrosov's Happiness is not Behind the Hills, take their place in the city. The museum was at first situated in Perm River Station Hall, but moved to the former tram depot in 2014.



Fantastic Plastics was an apt name for the exhibition, which was aimed at raising public awareness of plastic reuse. Among the recycled items used to make the art works were plastic bottles, caps, disposable plates and cups, and plastic bags. The exhibition was accompanied by an extensive educational programme.

Among the works we saw were colourful roof tiles with the potential to last for one hundred years. We saw vases in primary colours, designed in the Netherlands. We admired delicate jewellery, stylish trainers and chunky, robust toys. We saw photographs of clothes made from recycled plastic bags. The bags were melted using an iron on top of tracing paper, then glued together to make 'fabric'. Galina Larina creates accessories, garments and interiors using this method. Alexandra Polyarus has used the waste products from the automotive and advertising industries to create bags and backpacks. After the FIFA World Cup she reworked 2000 square meters of advertising banners into fashionable shopping bags.

Less of an art object than a piece of street furniture was a bench manufactured in Perm from a polymer composite made from recycled materials. It was exciting to know that such initiatives are taking place in the city. We understood that Perm is active in recycling its plastic bottles, as the collection point in the form of a beautiful wire mesh shell on the bank of the Kama River (sponsored by Sberbank) testifies.





## A Journey to the North of Perm Krai

*Carole Richardson*

There was a new excursion on the itinerary for our exchange visit to Perm in September 2019 – a two-day expedition to the north, to visit the towns of Cherdyn, Solikamsk and Nyrob.

I didn't know anything about these places beforehand – I don't think any of us did. All we knew was that we were going to be travelling deep into a fairly remote and empty part of Perm krai, and that Nyrob is where the road ends!

We were very lucky to get the best two weeks' weather in a dreadful summer, for our stay in Perm, so we set off in the university bus in (mostly) sunshine and a pioneering spirit, accompanied by our three Russian guides, Katerina, Nastya and Nadya. Our long straight road took us through endless forests of silver birch trees, which were just putting on their autumn colours, and which looked ridiculously beautiful in the autumn sunshine.

So beautiful in fact, that we had to stop and take photographs of them. Our guides had been pointing out the silvery, spidery reindeer moss, or cladonia, growing in great flat swathes through the forest, and picked handfuls of it to show us.

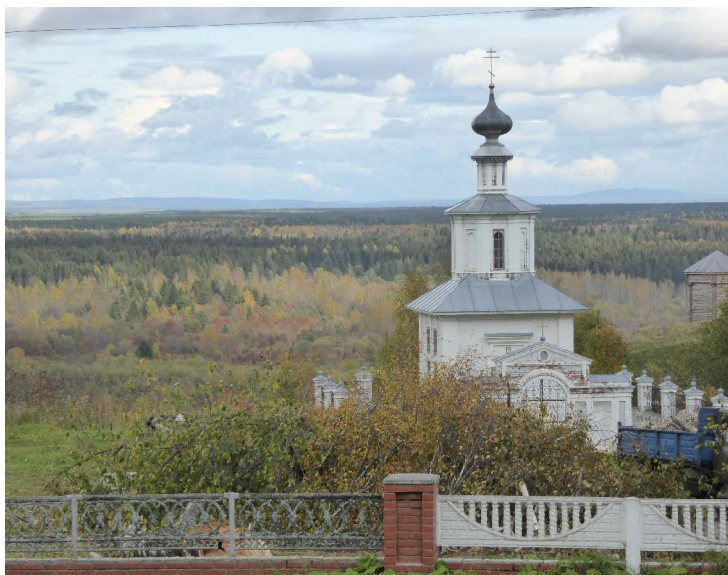
In this part of Russia, the land can be properly boggy, and reindeer moss is a sign that the ground is firm and safe to walk on. A useful tip to remember.

We were based in Cherdyn, 300 kilometres from Perm, a small town perched on the high bank of the Kolva River, a tributary of the Vishera. But with its many wooden houses, and the countryside visible all around, it looks and feels more like a large village.

We visited one of the few brick and stone buildings in the town centre. A rather grand one, actually. In its time it had been both a girls' school, and used by local merchants for entertaining. Now it's a museum, with room-sets recalling its various incarnations.

One room was dressed for a tea-party. These were obviously very popular (or very useful for networking), as there were sometimes four a day! The merchants often treated their guests to sugar, eaten by itself, straight from the cone. They also played games such as lotto and bilboquet (where you toss a ball and have to try and catch it in a cup – not as easy as it sounds – we tried!) They must have been very jolly tea parties.

Upstairs, as well as the merchant's office and the ladies' parlour, we visited the schoolroom. Girls studied here from the age of twelve, and received a good education. They laboured under the watchful gaze of the Tsar whose portrait



The Spasskaya Chapel in Cherdyn



Ready for a tea party in the Cherdyn museum

graced the walls, along with the icon for the daily prayers. In the 1940s the building was used as a hospital for soldiers wounded in the Great Patriotic War.

In the evening, a real treat. After a visit to the local church, where we shown around by a very jolly young priest wielding a truly enormous key, we went to the nuns' house for tea in their refectory. They laid on a delicious spread for us, delivering seemingly endless platefuls of little jam-filled cheesecakes called *vatrushki*, and jugfuls of the herbal tea *ivan-chai*, made from rosebay willow-herb, all of it home-made.

About 40 kilometres north of Cherdyn is Nyrob, described as an "urban locality" or "work settlement", centred around a large prison which dominates the approach to it. It's so remote it makes a good place for a prison. As Boris Godunov also realised in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when he despatched a member of the Romanov family here. We went down into the horrible little underground pit where the poor man was chained and incarcerated. The intention was to starve him to death, but he was kept alive for a year by the locals who fed him. Sadly they were all killed in the end.

Nyrob is where the road ends. If you want to go any further north from here, you can only do so by air. That boggy ground again ...

On our return journey southwards, we stopped in Solikamsk, by far the largest of our three destinations. It's all in the name: *sol*, for salt, and *kamsk* for the Kama River on which it stands. So no prizes for guessing that salt extraction was a major industry round here. At the Governor's House museum, we learned all about it in a small but fascinating exhibition, and saw some of the equipment used.

The governor was also the *voevoda*, the military commander responsible for the defence of the town. The house itself was part of the defences, built like a fortress, with walls nearly two metres thick. Thick enough, in fact, to accommodate the staircase to the upper floor, which was of necessity steep and narrow, and the steps rather uneven. Coming back down was even trickier, through a trap door in the floor, down into complete darkness!

There was one further treat in store for us on the road home back to Perm. A wonderful roadside stall overflowing with mushrooms of all kinds, cranberries, honey ... all the bounty of the forest.

We didn't get back home till late in the evening. But we had all thoroughly enjoyed our wonderful trip to the north.

## **OPA Discussion Group**

*David Roulston & Karen Hewitt*

The Discussion Group met on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> November. The first topic was based on 'An Interview with Nicolai Petro, Professor of political science at the University of Rhode Island' on: 'The real state of Russian Democracy'. The second topic was based on an article by Paul Robinson, Professor at the University of Ottawa, on 'Liberal Illiberalism - Extracts from an article in *Russia in Global Affairs* by Sergei Lavrov'.

Members continue to receive by email copies of topical articles related to current events in Russia and Russia-West politics. If any members are interested in joining the discussion, please email or phone David or Karen. There is no obligation to attend every meeting.

## **Web Site**

*Jessica Vlasova*

Please send any photos of visits to Perm or Perm Association events for the website photo gallery to Jessica at [jessica.vlaslova@gmail.com](mailto:jessica.vlaslova@gmail.com) or to her WhatsApp on 07766 025313. Note that under GDPR rules, individual permission is required for any photos which include recognisable people

## **Newsletter information**

*David Roulston*

Would all members please note that articles, including book reviews, etc. are always welcome for this Newsletter. The *submission deadline for the summer issue of Perm News is 15<sup>th</sup> May* but it is helpful if you let the editor (contact details below) know sooner if you plan to submit an item. Articles should be sent as email attachments preferably in docx format and not exceed about 600 words plus two jpg images, or approximately 800 words with no images. Shorter articles are always welcome. Note that individual permission for publication is now required for any photos which include recognisable people. Readers can browse past newsletters on the web site [www.oxfordperm.org](http://www.oxfordperm.org). The editor is grateful to Sue Gregory for her invaluable proofreading and general help with each issue of Perm News

## **Recent and Future Events**

*Karen Hewitt & David Roulston*

### **Recent Events**

In October, members had the pleasure of hearing Mary Dejevsky talk about ‘What is going on in Russia today’. She began by explaining that she would focus on President Putin, and then discussed Putin’s aims and aspirations for Russia from 2000 when he became President. These included economic security, control of the chaotic social situation which he had inherited, restoring pride in their country for Russian citizens, and establishing respect for Russia in the international community. She analysed why, as a result of the West misreading what was happening, he was and is often demonised in very unhelpful ways. She referred to the Munich 2007 meeting when he criticised the expansion of NATO to Russia’s borders as an example. She said that, as a journalist, she tried to look as objectively as possible at political leaders, and Putin is exceptionally quick in understanding difficult situations, with an immense command of detail. This helps him to be a good communicator.

The talk was followed with Mary Dejevsky answering questions and entering into detailed discussions with members of the audience.

In January 2020 Richard Sills gave a talk at St Antony’s College on Anthony Jenkinson, the sixteenth century explorer of Russia. The presentation was illustrated with many detailed images of Jenkinson’s map to explain how he managed to explore Russia from the north using rivers to connect with the Volga and on to Astrakhan and the Caspian Sea. It is hoped that Richard will give a detailed account of his talk in the summer issue of Perm News.

### **Future Events**

Film Screening. Sergei Kachkin, a Russian documentary film maker, now working in Moscow but originally from Perm, will be introducing and showing his film, Perm-36: Reflexion (2016) in the Nissan Theatre at St Antony’s College from 5 pm to 7 pm on Wednesday, 12th February. This film, about the former Gulag prison which many of you have visited, includes interviews with former prisoners and reflects on both Soviet and modern Russian attitudes. The screening is organised jointly by the Perm Association and the St Antony’s Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre and is free to the public.

The Annual General Meeting of the Perm Association will be held in the Long Room of the Town Hall on 5th March. Light refreshments (provided by you, please) and drinks (provided by the Association) will be available from 6 p.m. The business of reports and election of officers will start at 6.15, and we hope to finish that part of the evening by 7 p.m. Further refreshments and socialising will be followed by a talk. The speaker is yet to be confirmed.

Vadim Skovorodin, Editor of Business Class, a Perm paper and website which covers much more than business, will be in Oxford in mid-February, and we hope to arrange a talk by him.

Members will be interested to hear that Oxford and Perm are beginning to plan a joint project on Sustainable Development concerned with the environment, climate change and knowledge exchange between the two cities. There will be more about this in our next newsletter.

#### **Oxford Perm Association contact details**

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### **Magnificent Minsk and Mogilyov**

*Catherine Cooper*

*Every moment had its pleasure and its hope.... Jane Austen, Mansfield Park*

When my friend Marina Bolotova from Perm heard I was to be in Georgia she suggested we meet up in Belarus, as she had a friend, Valentina, who had agreed to let us have her flat whilst she was away. But the real mistress of the flat was Fenya the cat. During her free time Fenya had created her own style of Belarusian aerobics. As soon as we began breakfast she would take a flying leap from the window sill to the top of the fridge/freezer. Valentina had made for us the famous Draniki, floury potato pancakes which are usually eaten with a sour cream. She had also left directions for us to explore Minsk.

The first thing the traveller notices about the City of Minsk is the grandeur of its architecture. This city was entirely rebuilt after the war after being completely destroyed. It was awarded UNESCO status because the whole central city ensemble is a magnificent example of the Soviet Stalinesque architectural style, with references to Gothic, Baroque, Classicism and Eclecticism. The buildings are the embodiment of the past: symbols of Soviet power and prestige such as The House of Soviets, the Patriotic War Museum together with the 10 m high statue of Lenin in the Centre next to the Polish Catholic Church. The main street Independence Avenue is 15 km long. Recently awarded UNESCO status it stretches interminably. I worked out it would take roughly 3 hours to walk it. Everywhere is very clean, but colourless

The shopping malls resemble the old fashioned Emporiums of the 1950s with huge wide

staircases. There are no shortages but most goods are mass produced in China; there are no lifts and store detectives circulate openly.

Alexander Lukashenko has been President of Belarus since 1994. I was informed that the people call him 'Daddy'; others call him the last autocratic dictator in Europe. Nevertheless, he appears to have solved the housing crisis. Blocks of new high rise flats are everywhere and building continues. As regards infrastructure – the roads are excellent, unlike ours which are full of pot holes.

Our visit coincided with celebrations marking the City's 952nd birthday. The 18th Century Town Hall was open with artefacts on display. Outside a rock band took centre stage. British bands need have no worries.

After four days we caught the train to Mogilyov where we were met by Sasha and Raya Vershkovsky, our hosts. On our first night we all went for a walk and Sasha showed me how to do 'Sports Walking' which he told me was faster than running. Needless to say we collapsed in laughter at our antics. Sasha liked to wear a cap like the Peaky Blinder's star Tommy Shelby which amused me greatly. Raya was a superb cook. We were taken to see St. Stanislav's Cathedral; the house where the Tsar Nicholas II stayed when he was Commander-in-Chief in the First World War; the centre that was blown up by the Bolsheviks after the revolution; together with the monuments to the 1812 battle between the Napoleonic forces and the captured German tanks from the Second World War.

The next day we were invited to go for a picnic with their friends, Igor and Larissa. They imported furs from Turkey which were then made into coats. Once in the forest Sasha made a fire to cook the meat. Meanwhile, we went off collecting wild cowberries (similar to cranberries) in the woods. We ate them that night at supper with grouse and everyone, except me, drank cognac.

Igor was a hunter so his trophies were on display. For me, as a lover of all creatures great and small, it was hard to see a bear skin stretched along one wall, a stuffed lynx at the top of the stairs and dead ducks in flight mode fastened to the top of bookshelves. I think Dickens would have described him as a 'successful' man. When we visited his shop we saw one fur coat sell for 1,349 Belarusian roubles.

Larissa and Igor also owned two English Pointers. Known for their speed, power and perseverance the dogs accompanied him on his hunting trips. He showed me a video on his mobile of his favourite hunting a duck. As I have never seen any animal stalk another it was intimidating. The stamina, speed and tenacity with which the dog moved, his complete concentration on his target was just heart stopping. We later said our good byes. We met as strangers but we parted as friends.

My own friends often ask me if I ever find travelling alone frightening. Of course, I am not a robot, but like Fenya, the cat, my curiosity is foremost. I love the experience of walking down streets I have never walked down before. That's why for me 'every moment does have its pleasure and its hope'.

## BOOK REVIEW

**The Russia Anxiety - and how history can resolve it, by Mark B Smith** *David Roulston*  
Allen Lane, Penguin Random House UK, 2019

This book discusses Russia from the viewpoint of the 'Russia Anxiety', essentially how people/countries outside Russia have, for many centuries, felt about Russia. The author uses this theme to analyse and compare Russia activities, behaviour, rulers over a wide period from the 'Rus' origins in 862 with Riurik in Novgorod, Kiev in 882 to Vladimir in 980 when Russia entered Byzantine Christendom; then Dmitry defeating the Mongols in 1380 to secure Moscow, where Russia's future continued. Other important aspects of history are covered in various chapters, including Peter the Great's important contacts with the west, setting Russia on course to become a modern state and a European power, followed a century later by Catherine I (described as Russia's Enlightenment ruler) and reminding the reader that the country fought with France and Britain in the seven years war against Prussia. The author states that 'Russia has sometimes seemed a unique menace in western



eyes; this feeling, usually based on error and even more often on prejudice has come and gone for at least five centuries . We might call it the 'Russia Anxiety'.

As well as studying how Russia has evolved over ten centuries, with internal feuds and some very different leaders, Mark Smith makes extensive comparisons with the behaviour of 'western' countries with reference to their own methods of governance, treatment of the people and evolution. He emphasises the similarities and differences between Russia and 'western' countries in their behaviour to 'foreign' states, reminding the reader that Russia was always 'part of Europe'. He explains that Tsarist Russia always had an Eurasian reach and did not resort to the 'exterminatory policies' such as Belgium in the Congo, or the concentration camps of Britain during the Boer War but it did use familiar methods of violence crushing the nationalist uprisings in Poland in 1831, 1846, 1863, reminding readers that the British destruction of the Indian Mutiny was more violent. The Russians were 'not the most expansionary people in modern history and they did not administer the cruellest Empire, compared with the rollback of the continental United States which rested on the enslavement of black Africans'. We are told that the war in Chechnya was as traumatic as France's Algerian war, or Britain's fighting in 1950s Kenya and also reminded of the violence in 1947 when Britain left India.

The author frequently quotes ex-US ambassador George Kennan, saying that the process of confronting Russia's realities must come through scrutinising our own societies in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries', suggesting a cure for America's Russia Anxiety through greater National self-awareness. He knew the Soviet Union and had an independent understanding of the country's domestic life and its international politics and a scholarly appreciation of its literature and history. Stalin said he sounded like an intellectual from the age of Pushkin. Referring to the Cold War, the author quotes Kennan: 'What most needs to be contained is not so much the Soviet Union as the arms race itself'. He explained that if 'the attachment to Western values was eternal, NATO need not be ..... and America should look to itself ..... and put its own house in order .... to make American civilization an example of decency, humanity, and societal success from which others could derive whatever they might find useful to their own purposes'.

Smith then says that Kennan's prescription was not followed and so the Russia Anxiety was revived even during the 1990s, with America pushing a democratizing agenda on Moscow, but with little concern for the particularities of the Russian case, so that it came across as patronising and triumphalist. Kennan found it distressing that anxiety and suspicion of the new Russia were widespread in the Western press. For him, there was no possible threat that Russia would want to extend itself beyond its border. He refers to the rise of interventionist dogma in American foreign policy and the expansionary logic of European institutions and to extending NATO towards Russia borders as 'unnecessary, and in highest degree deplorable'. It was not that Russia would ever be an American-style democracy; but it was not a threat. The problem was the Russia Anxiety.

On democracy, Smith refers to internal Russian history such as the decree under Alexander II that emancipated the serfs which implied the existence of rights and even citizenship. This was the precondition of modern urban growth and large-scale industrialization. The zemstovs, introduced in 1864 under Tsar Alexander II, were elected councils in the provinces and were a form of local government with trial by jury. Self regulation of universities and more humane terms of army subscription were introduced.

As an example of the complex mix in the historical backgrounds of Russians the author refers to the poet Anna Akhmatova who died in 1996 [she received an honorary doctorate in Oxford], explaining that she made a lot of her own family origins, a combination of all the points of the Imperial Eurasian compass. She had Ukrainian-Cossack roots on her father's side and was born near Odessa. Her mother was Russian and the family moved to St. Petersburg where she attended the elite Marinsky Gymnasium. Later, she took the Tatar pen name Akhmatova, borrowed from her maternal great-grandmother descended from Chinggis Khan.

The author later again refers again to modern times saying that the Russia Anxiety is a syndrome with three sets of symptoms: fear, contempt and disregard. Disregard and contempt join with fear in a destructive cycle of relations with Russia.

The Memorial Society and the Perm 36 Gulag Museum are mentioned in reference to Stalin-era crimes.

The author concludes by stating that 'history offers one of the keys to the future, because the Russia Anxiety cannot dominate international politics when people study the Russian past in a critical and open minded way. For sure, it is a cyclical syndrome, and it might always rise and fall. But it is only when the cycle is broken and the Anxiety is gone that Europe will have a chance of being at peace with itself'.

## News from Perm-Oxford

*Galina Gusarova*



*Russian Theatre School in London*

## Interest in Russian Art

Interest in both classical and contemporary Russian culture has not been influenced by any political tensions. As well as positive bilateral relations there exists a cultural collaboration between Russia and Britain. Those in Britain interested in culture are enthusiastic about Russian culture regardless of what's going on in the political sphere. Every year in Britain the Bolshoi theatre goes on tour, Russian Film Week in London takes place and a large number of exhibitions are held. As well as this, scientific collaboration continues in the form of bilateral meetings between leading Russian and British Scientists. [Several films from the Russian Film Week were shown in Oxford, including Sabre Dance about the composer, Kachachurian and his time in Perm. *Ed*]