

THE MAKING OF A DOMRA 'LEFTY'

Matt Morgan is one of the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra's (SBO) principal prima domra players and the SBO is very lucky to have him. But he has a major problem.

He is left-handed.

It is easy enough to find left-handed – or 'lefty' guitars, which is how he first came to play in the orchestra. Finding 'lefty' prima domras was harder. So the SBO ordered a temporary "lefty" prima domra from Dieter Hauptmann in Adelaide. Dieter is more a balalaika maker than a domra maker, however this temporary "lefty" domra served Matt well.

He took it with him to China and more recently to Russia, when the SBO did its concert tour of the Russian Far East last year. The Russians were amazed to see a 'lefty' prima domra at all – there isn't much of a tradition there of left-handed instruments. They were even more amazed when they heard it had been made in Australia! But Matt's Aussie-made temporary 'lefty' had received quite a hammering, and was rapidly reaching the end of its natural life.

Fortunately by chance, Musical Director Victor Serghie had an email from a famous Russian provider of Russian instruments Anton Tsigankov, offering to supply domras and balalaikas made-to-order by one of Russia's finest luthiers. The SBO decided to 'bite the bullet' and placed an order for a left-handed domra to be made by Evgeny Vladimirovich Serzhantov, a highly regarded luthier in Moscow. This presented Serzhantov with quite a challenge. The whole instrument had to be designed in a mirror image of a RH domra.. Not only did the finger-board in the higher registers



Tanya Jephtha's domra - left with Matt Morgan's Serzhantov 'Lefty' - right

have to be tapered the other way, but the scratch-plate or 'pancer' had to be made back-to-front too. In the photo, left, compare Tanya Jephtha's & Matt Morgan's domras.



Evgeny Serzhantov is himself the son of a famous Soviet domra and balalaika luthier, Vladimir Filipovich Serzhantov. Evgeny says that his father used only well-seasoned timber some of the best of which was Russian mountain maple. It was also the rarest. Evgeny says : "My father used to teach me how to 'listen to the trees'. By that he meant, you must listen to the ringing sound that well seasoned timber makes when you tap it. If it is 'live' you can hear it, so use it. If it is dead – don't use it", he said. "Most of the timber I use is at least 30 years old. That means it is well seasoned, strong and stable – and of course it has that ring to it" said Evgeny.

Virtuoso Balalaika player Bibs Ekkel said: "I remember once going to see Evgeny at his house on the outskirts of Moscow - a Mecca for Russian folk instrument players. All around the house there were piles of timber, tons of it. He and his father used to scrounge timber from demolition sites" he said. "Evgeny has made over 1,500 instruments, all of them members of the Balalaika and Domra family; primas, altos and tenors mostly". They are much prized in Russia, but they are not cheap" said Bibs. "His father and he have carried on a tradition that started with some of the great luthiers from the tsarist period, Nalimov, Passerbosky, Snigeriev and more recently Sotsky from the early Soviet period, who had a great influence on Vladimir Serzhantov" he said. So the orchestra is indeed very honoured to have an instrument made by such a famous Russian luthier in its collection. We are grateful to Anton Tzigankov for making it all possible. We are grateful to Evgeny Serzhantov for making such a beautiful instrument and above all we are very grateful to Matt Morgan for playing it so beautifully – even if it is a 'lefty'! If you want to see Evgeny build a domra, go to this video on YouTube.

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Evgeny in his workshop



Domras - left and right handed



THE SBO BUSH CONCERT IN PUTTY

Every two years the SBO has a regular concert in Putty. This year's concert took place on Saturday, March 18. "Where's Putty" is the usual question. You might well ask.

Putty is 130km North of Parramatta, just off the Windsor to Singleton road which in the 1860's was the original Northern route from Sydney to the Hunter Valley. It is a pleasant two hour drive.

Putty is not even a one-horse town. It has no general store, no post office and no school. But it does have a Community hall and an active community but that's about it. And that is where the SBO gave its concert. The hall makes for a really intimate concert; almost entirely acoustic; only the singer's microphone is amplified.

This is wonderful for audience and players alike, where the real beauty of the Russian instruments can be heard without the need for electronic enhancement. The locals are very friendly and always make us very welcome with fine food and wine. They are a truly appreciative audience.

So where do all these people come from? That is still a mystery, but the letter boxes out front gives you a clue. They are all lined up along the road-side for those who live in the Putty valley and come to collect their mail. And they all come out of the wood work to hear the SBO give its bi annual concert. There were more people attending the concert than there were players but only just. Indeed there were almost as many letter boxes in Putty on that night as there were players in the SBO.

We extend our thanks to all the Putty community for organising and attending a wonderful concert.

And thanks also to our member, Martha Babineau for organising it!

UP AND COMING CONCERTS BY THE ORCHESTRA

The HUB - Springwood

Sunday, 9 July 2017 Concert starts 2.00 pm
104-108 Macquarie Road, Springwood NSW 2777
Tickets / enquiries
Online – bluemountainstheatreandhub.com.au/box-office/
Phone – Call 02) 4723 5050 Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm.
In person – at Blue Mountains Theatre & Community Hub

St Sergius of Radonezh Nursing Home

Sunday, 23 July 2017 Concert starts 1.00 pm
1 Gilbert St, Cabramatta NSW 2166
Enquiries: 02) 9727 9844

Russian Club

Sunday, 6 August 2017 Concert starts 2.30 pm
Crn Raw Square and Albert Road, Strathfield NSW
Tickets/enquiries Daytime 02) 88503623
No numbered seats, maximum 250
Purchase and book Online.
Ticket Purchase Link: [Try Booking](#)

Sisters of Mercy

Sunday, 20 August 2017 Concert starts 2:00 pm
Sacred Spaces - The Convent of Mercy,
30 Queen Street, Singleton NSW Australia
Tickets / enquiries (02) 6571 1348 Jan Falding

Independent Theatre

Sunday, 15 October 2017 Concert starts 2.30 pm
269 Miller St, North Sydney NSW Australia
Tickets and enquiries 02) 9955 3000
<http://www.theindependent.org.au/#!may/c1wpx>