

PRESIDENTS ADDRESS

Dear friends

The SBO has not been able to rehearse since March this year due to the coronavirus and we have had to cancel all our plans for performing any concerts in Australia. The tentative plans for a tour to Vladivostok later in 2020 have also had to be cancelled.

However the picture is changing daily and we may soon have an opportunity for limited rehearsals.

Meanwhile we had a get together digitally via our computers using an application called Zoom. It allowed us to log in, chat and catch up live.

Victor is encouraging all members to rehearse at home and we soon will be able to start rehearsals of 3 or 4 players as restrictions ease. It's good to see that as infection rates drop in Australia we are seeing a move to easing restrictions on people associating together such as the SBO.



A Zoom Practice Session

To all our friends we send you our very best wishes and hope you are well and coping with the extraordinary times we are living in.

**With warm regards
On behalf of the SBO members
Bruce Barker
President**

TIME FLIES! ~ UP CLOSE WITH SONJA STOJKOV



Percussionist Sonja Stojkov

Percussionist Sonja Stojkov joined the Orchestra when she was just 11 years old. During lock-down, we took time out to chat.

Novosti: *What is it that keeps you in the SBO?*

Sonja: I grew up with the Orchestra in my life, going to concerts with my Dad. In primary school, I wanted to get the Orchestra to perform at my school! I've now finished an undergraduate degree in psychology and a postgraduate degree. I got a black belt in karate and became a certified personal trainer, competed in premier league soccer for 2 years and lived overseas in Serbia. Most recently I started bee-keeping and I now have my own honey for sale.

The Orchestra is part of my identity; it is my family. In the beginning, it was the music. I played piano and finished the AMEB exams, so the Orchestra helped with that. Later, my friendships with other members became important.

Novosti: *You play so many instruments in the Orchestra....*

Sonja: The cymbal is my favourite. Sometimes, because of the nature of our venues (and because I never get a microphone) not much of me is heard... but the cymbal is always heard :-)

Novosti: *What are some SBO highlights for you?*

Sonja: Travels with the Orchestra have always been great. It surprises me that despite our size we can get organised and travel without arguments. We get pop-

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star treatment when we perform in other countries. It's awesome. We get to go to the best parties, have the best food and drink. And because the Orchestra is filled with so many characters, there is always entertainment! People live their own lives outside and share it with you.

On our trips, there are a lot of personal jokes that go on., just the usual mischief you get up to. When we were out in Moscow, I remember being up all night at the clubs then have to perform the next day. In St Petersburg we got stuck in the city centre because the bridges go up at a certain time late at night to let the ships sail through. I was in a tiny Russian sauna with about twelve of us, all whacking each other with traditional birch branches (veniki).

But one personal memory is from my very first trip to Russia. I was 18. We had just finished a concert, I can't remember where. But I was packing up my instruments and a lady came up to say a few things to me in Russian, which

I couldn't understand – then she took her necklace off and placed it around my neck. I never understood what she said, and I still have the necklace. She took her own jewellery off to give to me to wear. It was quite special.

Novosti: *How has the lock-down been for you?*

Sonja: I worked for a television series and the quarantine laws didn't allow for us to continue filming. So, I have been at home a lot. I'm reading a lot and exercising with my sister. We want to do a half marathon this year. I'm not one to sit on my phone, as I prefer face-to-face communication.

I am back on the piano. It has been many, many years since I practised, and I thought this was a good time to get my finger strength back, and surprisingly, it doesn't leave you. Finger memory is still there.

I'm just waiting patiently to get the opportunity to meet up again and have some good laughs as always.

LA PLEVITSKAYA: AN ASTONISHING LIFE!



Nadezhda Vasilievna Vinnikova

became a Tsarist officer's wife, a communist sympathiser and ultimately a spy.

Her name was Nadezhda Vasilievna Vinnikova, known as 'La Plevitskaya'. After discarding her first husband, she went to Moscow and sang in restaurants like the Яръ - Yar, famous for its gypsy bands, virtuoso balalaika players and buxom female singers. It wasn't long before she came to

the attention of the celebrated Russian opera singer, Feodor Chaliapin.

Thanks to him, she sang for the Tsar, and married an officer in the Imperial Cuirassiers. But despite moving in more aristocratic circles, she never forgot her peasant origins. Her second husband was eventually killed in WWI, and after the Revolution, she became a communist and sang for the Red Army.



Restaurant Yar

That was until 1919, when she was captured by the White Army. Soon a White Army General, Nikolai Skoblin,

was smitten by her. They married, but as the Red Army was victorious they fled to France. As exiles in the 1920s, Nadezhda sang in restaurants frequented by the Russian émigré community in Paris. As the West fell in love with songs like Ochi Chorniye and Kozak, her fame spread.

Before long she was touring the capitals of Europe and the United States where she was once accompanied by Sergei Rachmaninov. Her husband, Skoblin, meanwhile had become a leader of the Russian émigré community, and Nadezhda acquired a love of fine furs and jewellery worn by affluent French women. But she never lost her communist sympathies and eventually persuaded Skoblin to join her as an NKVD double agent, a 'class act'!

In 1930 they were now posing as Mr & Mrs Grozovsky. As key Soviet agents in Paris acting as intermediaries between the NKVD and the Gestapo, they helped uncover 'enemies of Stalin'. Their principal victims were Red Army Chief Marshal Tukhachevsky and a White Russian General, Yevgeny Miller, whose kidnap in Paris they orchestrated. And all the time she appeared superbly dressed, with lacquered nails, furs and jewellery, like a Soviet Bond girl – but a genuine spy.

Soon the 'Grozovskys' were under French surveillance and Skoblin escaped to Spain from where he couldn't be extradited to France. Nadezhda remained in Paris but the French secret service finally caught up with her while she was being chauffeured by an NKVD driver in a Soviet embassy Cadillac. She was arrested and imprisoned as a Soviet spy, and she died in prison in 1940, during the Nazi occupation. This was a real spy story of a remarkable woman who popularised many of the Russian songs played by the SBO today – a story that leaves James Bond and Le Carré novels for dead!



CAN YOU HELP?

The SBO is always seeking to perform at new venues. Maybe you know a venue where we can introduce our beautiful Russian folk music to a new audience. We also need additional musicians, so if you come up with any ideas please contact our Musical Director,

Victor Serghe on 0409 058 895 or our Secretary, **Richard She on 0402 179 098.**

