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A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In a flash, 2023 is fast approaching along with all the merrymaking that entails. So, before the Silly Season gets underway, it's good to take stock of what we in the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra have achieved this year.

In a gradual return to form, we performed three well-received concerts this year – at the Richmond Club in May in support of NSW flood victims, a return to the Russian Club in September after a 3-year absence and a terrific concert in the south coast town of Gerringong in October. The SBO quintet also performed by request at a Russian wedding in November, and you'll read more about that and our Gerringong concert later. Off the back of this, we're aiming to resume our pre-COVID concert schedule in 2023 so keep an eye on our social media for any announcements. Please also feel free to contact us regarding potential venues or concerts as we are always looking for new places to perform.

As we come to the end of the year, I'd like to give thanks: thanks to the members of the SBO, for contributing their time and effort to be part of this unique and amazing group; thanks to our family and friends who have assisted throughout this year; thanks to our musical director, Victor Serghie, for his tireless efforts in bringing the sound of the SBO; and last but not least, thanks to all who have attended our concerts and supported us this year, as after all, an orchestra is nothing without an audience. On behalf of the SBO, I wish you all a happy holiday season and look forward to you at one of concerts in the new year.



RICHARD SHE, SBO President

A QUINTET IN THE HUNTER BY LAZAR STOJKOV, BASS DOMRIST



SBO Quintet

"It was a jovial affair. The setting was tranquil and had a real rustic charm to it, like much of the Hunter Valley. We had been invited as a quintet within the SBO to perform for a wedding reception on a Sunday in November. The weather was picturesque, and the reception was held under a grand outdoor pavilion. Celebrations were well into day two by the time we took the stage.

"We were a real hit. What we had thought would be treated as ambient music became the focal point of celebration, as almost everyone was on their feet, indulging in the festivity.

"We played an array of signature Russian folk, ballet, and waltz songs that were graciously received by all.

"The timbre and range of the ensemble was optimal, as each of the five instruments complemented one another exquisitely. We started slow, but things really ramped up once we were a few songs in. We had to repurpose two vocal microphones as we were struggling to be heard. The crowd was practically on

top of us so they could hear us better, but hear us they did. It all served to intensify the cultural spirit and made us musicians even more confident. We could feel the synergy.

"The program was meticulously arranged and timed. Credit to Victor and Tanya for their efforts towards song arrangement and selection. Even though we had a set time, the guests implored us to play a few extra pieces. We gladly obliged.

"We finished off with a customary waltz of the newlyweds, as they embraced at centre stage.

"Our music was felt by all, and we were touched by the amount of joy and merriment we brought. There's no doubt we made the day that little bit more perfect for the families involved. What a delight."

For more details please refer to our website

www.balalaika.com.au

GERRINGONG – A 'FEARFUL PLACE' FOR A CONCERT



Gerringong Town Hall

On October 30th, the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra gave a concert in the Gerringong Town Hall. It had been ten years since we last played in this beautiful South Coast seaside town. It had been a long time between drinks, but thanks to the enthusiasm of the audience, you wouldn't have known it. Gerringong presented the SBO with some challenges. "Ten years ago fitting 12 + musicians onto the Town Hall stage had been no problem," said musical director Victor Serghie. "This time trying to fit more than 20 players onto the stage was a real challenge. What had changed, was the size of the orchestra," he said. "We had grown. The stage hadn't - to say nothing of much more sound equipment, speakers, music stands including a huge contra-bass balalaika!"



Victor Serghie reveals "I didn't know Dmitry was so tall!"

So somehow 23 members of the SBO managed to squeeze in! And the audience seemed to connect with us straight away. Maybe it was the fiery Russian music. Maybe it was the red Russian costumes, or perhaps the strange instruments; an endless source of curiosity to many.

Connectivity is very much a two-way street. Maybe for us, it's the relief of getting out of the City. We often feel inspired by our location. We always seem to get a good reception when we play in the country, and this would be no different.

This concert would be a mix of symphonic-sounding orchestral pieces, popular folk pieces and songs. And as always, inspiring solo



Neil Simpson

performances: like Richard She's rendition of the Russian Sailor's Dance, his virtuosos fingers literally flying over the accordion. Then there was oboist Neil Simpson with his rendition of Kolo Kolo. "The haunting sound of the oboe fits beautifully with Russian music," said Victor, "think: that famous theme from Swan Lake."



Lazar Stojkov & his Bass Domra

Lazar Stojkov performed The Dying Swan on his bass domra. Victor reflected that it's an unusual solo instrument perhaps, but like the cello, inspiring just the same. "If Yo Yo Ma can do it, so can Lazar!" Victor added.



Natasha and Dmitry

The audience also found our vocalists inspiring. Dmitry Kuevda with his powerful baritone voice and Natasha Tatarinoff with her youthful performance of Once upon a December. The audience loved it. That's the point of Russian singing. It doesn't matter if you don't understand a word of Russian. There's music in the words.



Tanya (far left) & Sophia (vocal)

Then something really inspirational happened. There was a familiar face in the audience, our former singer Sophia Markovtzev. One of the pieces in our repertoire is a domra solo, Gazing into Blue Lakes. It features Tanya Jephtha, our virtuoso prima domra player. But it also had a missing vocal part – a vocal part, which hadn't been sung for years. And Sophia was the one who used to sing it!

So a conversation took place between Victor and Sophia. "I asked her if she would like to come up and sing the missing part again," said Victor. "We then had a discussion about the words – could she remember them? After all it had been a few years since she last sang it. Sophia sang it unrehearsed. It was beautiful. The applause said it all," said Victor, which pretty well wrapped up the concert in Gerringong.

'Gerringong' means in the Dharawal language a 'fearful place'. But one suspects something has been lost in translation. With its rolling green hills and endless sandy beaches it is hard to imagine a less 'fearful' indeed, any more inspiring setting for what turned out to be an outstanding SBO concert!



**Wishing all of you
our treasured supporters
a very merry Christmas
and a wonderful, joyful New Year!
All the best for 2023 from
the Sydney Balalaika Orchestra**

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 Serghie on 0409 058 895 or
our President, **Richard She on 0402 179 098.**

